

# Superintendent's Back-to-School Update

Las Lomitas Elementary School District

August 2025



## LOOK INSIDE:

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Board President  
Message -  
Page 2

Budget Update -  
Page 3

Staffing Update -  
Page 4

LLEF Invitation -  
Page 8

...and so much  
more!

## Message to LLESD Families from Mr. B

Dear LLESD Families,

Last week, my own kids—now a 6th and 10th grader—headed back to school. Like clockwork, each August, my heart grows legs and walks out the door as they set off to write another chapter in their school journey. If you feel that same tug this week, know this: **we got you, and we got your kid.** They're in a great place, learning from incredible staff who care deeply about both who they are and who they are becoming.

This year brings both opportunities and challenges for LLESD. Our design teams are already tackling big questions about literacy, math, wellness, and what it means to be a great place to work. At the same time, we continue the hard work of balancing our budget—reducing what was a \$4.7 million deficit to about \$2.5 million. The first half is easier than the last, but with your support, I know we can do it.

Take a look through this newsletter to see the momentum, meet new staff, and mark your calendars for key events. Thank you for entrusting us with your children—it's an honor we never take for granted.

With gratitude,  
*Erik*



## Message from President Winikoff

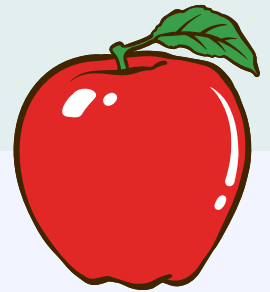
On behalf of the Las Lomas Elementary School Board, a warm welcome back to school!

We hope you and your families had a restful summer and are ready for an exciting new year of learning and growth. This past year, we engaged in extensive discussions with the community about the qualities you value in district leadership. Your feedback was instrumental as we selected our new Superintendent, Erik Burmeister. We heard your concerns about the need for a leader who is not only dedicated to our students' academic success, but also passionate about fostering a positive and inclusive environment; embracing effective learning approaches; and implementing effective strategies for change.

In this newsletter, you will read about the innovative steps Las Lomas has initiated and - in some cases - already taken. The Board expresses our heartfelt gratitude to staff working with dedicated Design Teams in areas of academic excellence, student engagement and support, and Las Lomas working environment. You will also read a budget and facility update as the district continues to prioritize controlling costs, particularly in the face of our structural budget deficit. The Board reiterates its commitment to providing the best possible education for every student, while responsibly stewarding taxpayer dollars.

Thank you for your continued communication, and we encourage you to continue to reach out to the Board at any time at [schoolboard@llesd.org](mailto:schoolboard@llesd.org). I am excited for the year that lies ahead, and confident that we will have the chance to experience the best days of Las Lomas together.

Sincerely,  
*Paige Winikoff*  
President, LLESD Board of Trustees



## *We're bringing back a treasured favorite...* **Apple for the Classroom Returns**

I'm excited to announce that **Apple for the Classroom** is returning. For many years, this beloved tradition in LLESD allowed teachers and grade levels to request additional donations for their classrooms to support field trips and experiences that make learning fun. Now, we're bringing it back in a simpler, stronger, and more sustainable way.

Beginning this fall, **the first \$200** of every **Las Lomas Education Foundation** donation or pledge per student (*made by October 31*) will go directly into a grade-level fund for "extras" like field trips, enrichment activities, and special classroom materials.

To ensure every child benefits, 10% of Apple funds will also support our specials—music, art, electives, and PE. We hope to raise between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per grade level for the moments, memories, and materials that make the LLESD experience so special.

A big thank you to the Las Lomas Education Foundation for partnering with us in this endeavor—and to all of our families whose generosity continues to make engaging learning possible.

# Budget Update

## **The Work Continues**

In the Midsummer Newsletter, I shared the launch of our Balanced Budget Initiative—a two-year process to ensure LLESD's long-term financial health. If you didn't get a chance to read it, I encourage you to take a look, as it gives important context for the work ahead. In summary, here's where we stand today:

## **Better Position Than Expected**

Back in March, we faced a projected \$4.7 million deficit. Today, thanks to disciplined budgeting and stronger-than-expected revenues, that number is down to about \$2.5 million. Key drivers include:

- \$660,000 in budget carryover from site, department, and technology reductions.
- Savings through attrition (not layoffs), such as holding the French position open, reducing 4/5 PE staffing, and returning La Entrada to one Assistant Principal.
- Higher property tax growth than projected, adding \$200,000 annually.
- Early momentum from LLEF, projecting \$1 million in giving.
- Renegotiated Champion's rental contract, adding \$231,000 annually.
- A return to donation-funded student experiences like OutdoorEd, field trips, and yearbooks.

These steps allowed us to protect important programs this year, including smaller class sizes in grades 3–4, additional Special Education support, and technology staffing at La Entrada.

## **Recent Progress**

On August 11, the Board's Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) reviewed our progress and discussed a new proposal: splitting into two advisory groups—one focused on auditing and finance functions, and the other, a

Superintendent's Advisory Committee, focused on budget priorities and potential revenue strategies, including a future parcel tax conversation. The BAC recommended that CBO Mei Chan and I draft a proposal for further input before bringing it to the Board this fall.

In the meantime, the BAC is also helping us create a Budget FAQ to better inform the community about our budget process, spending priorities, and options for revenue growth and cost control.

## **Philanthropy is Key**

*What can you do to help?* Please consider investing in the Las Lomas Education Foundation (LLEF). Any hope we have of returning our district to the black without making impactful cuts relies on this community reinvesting in the Foundation.

We hope to more than double last year's gift to the general fund, and we have aspirational plans to get there—but *we need you*. Please take a moment to review the information from our Foundation in the LLEF section of this newsletter to see how your support directly sustains the programs and opportunities that make LLESD such a special place.

## **Looking Ahead**

As we face the remaining \$2.5 million structural deficit, we can take pride in closing the first \$2 million gap. Addressing the final \$2.5 million may be far more challenging and may require more difficult decisions.

If we can meaningfully increase revenue over the next couple of years, the pressure will ease, and we can focus squarely on delivering the remarkable education we all want for our students. With greater clarity, a stronger footing, and a shared purpose, I am confident that together we can put LLESD on solid financial ground. Stay tuned to Board meetings and future newsletters for updates as this critical work continues.



# Welcome New Staff!

On August 14 and 15, we had the joy of welcoming 18 new team members—teachers and classified staff—into the LLESd family. Their two-day orientation was designed not only to provide practical resources but also to build meaningful connections as they begin their journey with us.

The first morning began with a warm continental breakfast, generously hosted by our LLEA and CSEA partners, followed by introductions from Assistant Superintendent Val Park and the administrative team. I then led an activity centered on our district philosophy—giving ourselves permission to feel—which also helped new staff connect with one another.

Next came a district bus tour, highlighting the rich diversity of the communities we serve from Atherton to Portola Valley, from Menlo Park to East Palo Alto. I had a blast serving as the “tour guide,” sharing random facts I’ve collected over the years from working and living in this area.

As I reminded our team, “*To best serve them, we must know them.*” Understanding our students begins with understanding the diverse backgrounds, neighborhoods, and stories that shape who they are. At each school, our “Welcome Wagons” greeted new staff with enthusiasm, a gesture that truly captured the spirit of LLESd.



After lunch, our new colleagues received their technology devices and began preparing for the year, with the general education staff in their classrooms and our special education team with Dr. Marta Grau Batlle and Julie Chandler.

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classrooms and our special education team with Dr. Marta Grau Batlle and Julie Guaspari.

On Friday, orientation continued at school sites and wrapped up at La Entrada with an engaging team-building web activity. By the end of the two days, our new staff left with a deeper understanding of LLESd’s values, a network of new colleagues, and the tools they need to thrive.

We are so excited to introduce this talented and caring group of educators and staff to our parent community. Please join us in giving them the warmest of welcomes.

## Help Us Welcome Our New Staff..

Barbara Ashley-DiGrande, 4th-5th Grade RSP

Recep Iscan, 4th Grade Teacher

Julie Flynn, School Psychologist

Megan Scatena, 6 - 8 Tech Teacher

Wendy Zaldana, Paraeducator

Alma Bartolome Mateo 4th-5th Grade RSP

Gerardo Sanchez, Paraeducator

Laura Luna-Sanchez, Paraeducator

Monika Charrette, Admin Assistant (LTS)

Chrissy Chang 4th-5th PE Teacher

Natasha Hsu, Kindergarten

Gelo Megan, Speech Language Pathologist

Wini McMichael, School Psychologist

Lyndsay Douglas, Paraeducator

Isai Pantoja, Paraeducator

Brian Yanari, Paraeducator

Brianne Olson, LTS

Joann Dillon, LTS

Richelen Powell, LTS

Frances Valinsky, LTS

Batoul Elsabah, Paraeducator (LTS)

Stacy Truong, Paraeducator (LTS)



## How we use time at La Entrada

For over a decade, La Entrada's 6–8 “waterfall” schedule has given students the chance to learn course-level content at different times of the day—reducing the impact of time of day on learning. While that's benefited students whose performance is strongly affected by timing, it has also created challenges, including, but not limited to: large swings in PE class sizes, tricky transitions for special education students, higher staffing costs, and fewer opportunities for 4–5 and 6–8 teams to collaborate.

This year, we're seizing the opportunity to think big. Our School Schedule Design Team will leave no stone unturned—listening closely to student and staff voices, studying how time is used in our classrooms, and looking outward to learn from the schedules of high-performing neighboring schools. We'll explore what's working, identify where we can improve, and design a schedule that fuels academic growth, supports every learner's needs, and builds a stronger sense of connection across grades. This is more than just a calendar tweak—it's about creating the kind of school day that inspires, challenges, and unites our Leopards.

We're looking for passionate, solution-oriented family members to join us on this journey. If you're curious about how schedules shape learning, eager to collaborate with staff and community members, and ready to help create a schedule that serves every Leopard, we'd love to have you on the School Schedule Design Team. Details on how to express interest will be coming soon—your voice can help shape the future of La Entrada.

## *Safe, clean, modern, and conducive to student learning...* **Facilities in Las Lomitas ESD**

While students and staff enjoyed summer break, both campuses were busy getting a refresh — and now we're ready to welcome everyone back to brighter, safer, and more comfortable spaces.

Classrooms and shared areas have been deep-cleaned and organized, Las Lomitas buildings received fresh paint, new HVAC units were installed, and every fluorescent light across the district has been replaced with energy-efficient LEDs. Playgrounds and parking lots have been restriped for safety and fun, and new filtered water stations are ready to use.

### **What's Ahead**

These upgrades are just the beginning. In the months ahead, we'll be using facility improvement funds to replace carpets, add a professional sound system to Jensen Hall, and — *with the help of your donations to the Las Lomitas Education Foundation's annual campaign* — build a new broadcast studio at LE and MAKER spaces at both campuses to strengthen our STEM programs, one of the Foundation's five priority funding pillars.

These projects are investments in the daily experience of our students and staff, ensuring modern, safe, and engaging learning environments for years to come.

# The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round!

We're committed to making school transportation safe and simple.

- East Community families should have received bus schedules by mail.
- All other families can pick up schedules at the school office during Meet the Teacher on Tuesday, August 19:
  - Las Lomas — 8:45–9:15 a.m.
  - La Entrada — 9:30–10:00 a.m.

For safety, bus schedules are not posted online.

**The good news:** bus stops are unchanged from last year, so routines remain the same.

**Questions?** Please reach out to Joyce; we're here to help: [jmassaro@llesd.org](mailto:jmassaro@llesd.org).



# Meet the Teacher Tuesday, August 19



*Excited to meet your child's teacher, sneak a peek at their classroom, and reconnect with fellow families and students? Please join us on **Tuesday morning, August 19**, in your child's classroom. Las Lomas will greet families from 8:45–9:15 a.m., followed by La Entrada from 9:30–10:00 a.m.*

Campus maps will be available at the front office. Families are encouraged to walk or bike if possible - what a helpful opportunity to practice your child's commute. As a reminder, classroom assignments will be accessible via PowerSchool by Monday, August 18.

## New School Board Meeting Space, Time, & Flow

Starting with our first Board meeting of the year, the **Multiuse Room (MUR)** at **La Entrada** will become the new regular home for our Board of Trustees meetings. By day, this flexible space will continue to serve LE students, and by night, it will transform into LLESD's official Board Room.

Over the next few months, we'll be using dedicated facility funds (which by law can only be used for facility improvements) to modernize the technology in the MUR/Board Room. These upgrades will help ensure that our governance meetings are delivered in a professional, accessible, and effective way. It will take us some time to complete this work, but we're excited to improve the overall experience of engaging in local government.

We are also officially adjusting our Board meeting start time. Regular open session meetings will now begin at 6:30 p.m. instead of 7:00 p.m.—a small shift designed to help everyone finish a little earlier in the evening.

Finally, at our first meeting—**Wednesday, August 20** (*also the first day of school for students!*)—I will be piloting a slightly adjusted flow to our Board meetings. The goal is greater clarity, smoother facilitation, more meaningful public engagement, and yes—*hopefully shorter meetings*.



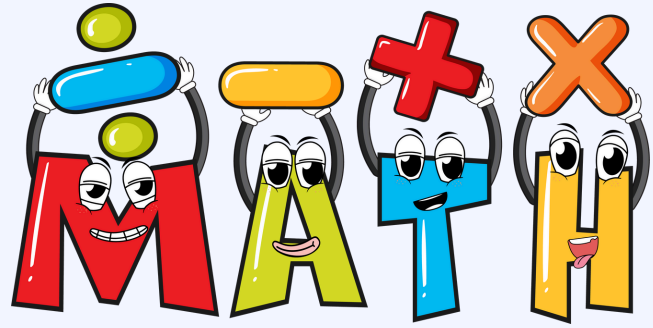
# LLESD Mathematics Pathways Update

In July, I shared that LLESD is embarking on a TK–8 redesign of our math pathways, grounded in the belief that rigor and equity go hand in hand. While the full redesign will take several years, we are starting this work in grades 6–8, with the goal of creating clear, supported pathways that prepare every student for the challenges of high school math and beyond.

Over the summer, our middle school math teachers have been hard at work collaborating on this effort. One of the biggest shifts is that our advanced courses will no longer skip content. Instead, they will move at a faster pace while ensuring students fully learn the material. We have also reaffirmed the alignment of our Honors Algebra course with high school Algebra 1 and our Geometry course with high school Geometry. Families can be confident that students taking these courses in middle school are experiencing the same rigor they would in high school.

This year, we are also introducing Math 8, which—along with Middle School Algebra—will focus strongly on Algebra readiness. Both courses are designed to ensure students are fully prepared to succeed in Algebra 1 as freshmen.

We are also taking steps to strengthen our assessment tools, giving teachers, students, and families the right data to make informed decisions about needed supports and to ensure our curriculum is meeting the needs of all learners.



Looking ahead, our teachers will continue this work through a Math Pathways Design Team that will refine curriculum sequencing, strengthen intervention structures, and ensure readiness for rigorous coursework. If you are particularly passionate about math and feel you have perspective and expertise to offer, we have a few spots on the team for parents. Feel free to reach out to express your interest.

I hope to see you at one of our Math Town Halls planned for this school year, where we'll share updates and invite your feedback as the design work continues.

**ATTENTION:** Families with students in grades 6–8:

MS students will receive their Chromebooks in their core classes on August 20th. Please check out our [Chromebook reminders](#) and [Acceptable Use Policy](#), which will be shared with students.



## Improvements in Lunch Options

We've heard your feedback on our food program, and we want you to know that we value it. Our goal is to provide the highest quality, most appealing food possible for our students. We also want to acknowledge a challenge: as a small district without commercial kitchens, we—like many of our neighboring districts in Menlo Park, Portola Valley, and Woodside—must rely on outside vendors. Since COVID, many school food vendors have stopped serving schools, leaving limited options.

That said, we're fortunate that The LunchMaster has listened to

our input and made improvements. And this year, LLESD has invested in new ovens for our schools, which has brought a major boost to both taste and quality. Entrées are now fresher, more flavorful, and we're able to offer exciting new menu items, such as:

- **Popcorn chicken & tater bowl**
- **Chicken calzone**
- **Burritos**
- **Enchiladas**
- **Picnic bistro box (cold)**

The new ovens have also solved some long-standing challenges: no more soggy buns on hamburgers, cheeseburgers, hot dogs, or corn dogs; pizza crusts are now crisp; and pasta and rice come out cooked just right—not mushy.

Please encourage your students to give these new options a try! And remember, even if the entrée of the day isn't appealing, stopping by the lunch line for fresh fruit, vegetables, and cold milk still counts as a complete meal, which helps the District receive meal reimbursement.

Finally, a reminder that in the State of California, lunch is free for all students. If your child does not prefer the day's options through our vendor, the only alternative is to bring a lunch from home—an option many of our students and families choose.

## How LLESD Uses Assessments to Support Student Growth

Ever wonder how LLESD uses assessments—and why they matter for your child? Assessments give teachers a clear picture of how students are learning, helping us provide the right support and challenge at the right time. We use four main types—formative, summative, diagnostic, and benchmark/interim—to guide teaching and learning.

In LLESD, this includes tools like the Amira Dyslexia Screener (K-2), IXL Math & ELA, On-Demand Writing, and the MDTP (Math Diagnostic Testing Project) for math diagnostics and placement. Quick daily check-ins let teachers adjust lessons immediately, while diagnostics at the start of a unit or year help tailor instruction to student needs. Benchmark assessments track growth over time, and summative assessments measure learning at key milestones.

Our goal isn't to give more tests, but to use assessments thoughtfully—so we can personalize learning, keep parents informed, and ensure every child grows into a confident, capable learner.



# LLEF Launches NEW Priority Funding Pillars

As we begin the 2025–26 school year, the Las Lomas Education Foundation (LLEF) is building on the palpable energy as we sail into the 2025–26 school year. With your help, LLEF is ready to make an even greater impact—and this year, we’re excited to share a refreshed vision for how your gifts will shape the student experience.

At the heart of this year’s Annual Giving Campaign are five new priority funding pillars:

- **STEM & Innovation** – Maker spaces, science labs, engineering courses, and technology instruction that prepare students to be curious problem-solvers and confident innovators.
- **Arts, Languages, & Libraries** – Full-time art and music teachers, credentialed librarians, and rich language programs that foster creativity, cultural fluency, and literacy.
- **Student Wellbeing** – Counseling, social-emotional learning, adult role models, and after-school enrichment programs that support today’s learners.
- **Class Size** – Small class sizes that allow for deeper engagement and meaningful relationships between students and teachers.
- **Teacher Quality & Professional Development** – Coaching and training to ensure our educators remain leaders in instructional practice and student success.



LAS LOMITAS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

And yes, Apple for the Classroom is back—giving families a direct way to enrich grade-level experiences through field trips, special projects, and classroom extras.

Every family’s participation matters as we aim for 100% involvement in the Annual Giving Campaign. Whether you’re new to the district or a long-time supporter, there’s a place for you in this important work.

## Save the Date: Pancake Breakfast

 **Saturday, September 27 | 8:30–11:00 a.m.**  
 **Las Lomas Courtyard**

Kick off the year with pancakes, coffee, fresh fruit, and fun—all while supporting our schools. Sponsorships are available (starting at \$1,000) and offer visibility and impact. To sponsor, contact Executive Director Dan Bergeron at [danb@llef.org](mailto:danb@llef.org) by August 15.

**Learn more or make your gift at**  
[www.llef.org/donate](http://www.llef.org/donate).

## Important Dates

**August 19:** LL Meet-the-Teacher, 8:45 a.m. LE Meet-the-Teacher, 9:30 a.m.

**August 20:** First Day Back for Students

**August 20:** First School Board Meeting of the 2025-26 School Year

*(NOTE: New start time and location: 6:30 p.m. LE MUR)*

**August 20 - 22:** Early Release for TK-3 (see schedule published from LL)

**August 28:** LE Back to School Night, 6:00 p.m.

**September 1:** Labor Day NO SCHOOL

**September 4:** LL Back to School Night, 6:00 pm.

**September 27:** LLEF/PTA Community Pancake Breakfast @ LL 8:30 - 11:00 a.m.