



Education  
at Turner  
Elementary is  
growing  
**Page 5**



Fresno Unified  
School District  
Students show  
Achievement  
**Page 8**



Every day  
Counts! District  
encourages  
student  
attendance  
**Page 8**



# Building Futures

A Publication of the Fresno Unified School District



Volume 1, Edition 1

Fresno Unified School District - Serving the Community since 1889

August 2004

## Measure K projects under way

Voters in Fresno Unified School District overwhelmingly supported Measure K in the March 2001 election, approving \$199 million for new schools and upgrades to other schools throughout the District.

The voters' faith in the District saw dirt fly in May as administrators and residents celebrated the ground breaking for the new Akira Yokomi Elementary School, the first of four new schools to be built with Measure K money.

Located on Fresno and McKenzie Streets, the new school will be the first named after a Japanese-American in the Central Valley and second in the entire state. The late Akira Yokomi, owner of the Central Fish Company, and his family are well known for their support of the downtown community since the company was founded in 1950. Naming the school after Yokomi is a recognition of



his work for the community.

It will be a model for the other new schools which will soon break ground in the Fresno Unified School District. The schools will be named for Mario Olmos, Chestnut and Mono Avenues; Deborah A. Williams, Fruit and Dakota Avenues; and Mollie S. Bakman, Belmont and Helm Avenues.

A fusion of traditional Japanese and modern civic ceremony highlighted the multicultural theme of the Yokomi ground breaking ceremony. To commemorate the event, a traditional Japanese ceremony complemented the civic ceremonies for the affair. Reverend Masaru Okazaki performed a purification ceremony on the site and a lion dance was performed. The Fresno High Junior ROTC Color Guard marched with the state and federal flags. Commander Don Wakida of the Veterans of Foreign War Sierra Nisei 8499 led the "Pledge of Allegiance," after which Fresno High School student Esther Sandersier sang the "National Anthem."

Terry Simerly, Associate Superintendent hosted the event, which brought praise from legislative leaders from around the state. State Assemblyman Steve Samuelian's representative presented a "Certificate of

**Please see Measure K, Page 6**



## Welcome to Building Futures

You hold in your hand the first edition of Building Futures, part of the Fresno Unified School District's ongoing plan to publicize the achievements of the District's students and staff.

In this edition you will find stories about the District's efforts to encourage good attendance, a feature on a partnership between McLane High School and the law firm of McCormick Barstow and new guidelines for Special Education.

Future editions of Building Futures will appear during the 2004-2005 school year in November, February and May.

In addition to Building Futures, the district will continue the bi-monthly production of the District's e-news bulletin.

Sign up at the District's website at [www.fresnounified.org](http://www.fresnounified.org).





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# Building Futures

A Publication of the Fresno Unified School District

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## Building Futures

**Susan Bedi**  
Community Relations Officer

Building Futures is published August and November, 2004 and February and May, 2005 by the Community Relations Office of Fresno Unified School District. The department can be reached at (559) 457-3733 or online at [www.fresnounified.org](http://www.fresnounified.org).



## Board Message



**Patricia R. Barr**  
Board of Education President

No school board can go it alone in accomplishing its highly complex and demanding governing work. The indispensable foundation for high impact governing is a strong board, superintendent, support staff and community working partnership that is close, positive, productive and solid. Building such a working partnership is no easy task especially within a district our size. However, no matter how daunting the challenge, your school board, interim superintendent, support staff and school community are coming together to build a strong foundation that will both support and spearhead student achievement. I invite you to join us in this effort by visiting a school, becoming a volunteer in a classroom, by making the time to attend a public meeting but most importantly by reading to a child every day.

## PTA Message



**Deborah Johnson**  
District PTA President

Greetings on behalf of the Fresno Unified PTA Council. With summer vacation almost over and the new school year approaching quickly, the first day of school will be here before you know it. We welcome you to take an active role in your child's education.

In the upcoming weeks, Fresno Unified schools will hold "Back to School Nights." These events inform families what will be expected of the student and what supplies each student will need for the upcoming year. This is a great time to get to know your child's teacher and begin working as a partner to help your child succeed.

We know that this is a busy time for you with Back to School activities and the starting of the school year. Please include, among the many activities that will probably be on your calendar, parent involvement at your school site. This may include something as simple as helping the teacher in the classroom one day a month or even taking time to have lunch with your child at school and your child's friends.

Another way to take an active role would be to join your local school's PTA or Parent Club. By being a member (or even being on a Board), you can look beyond the interests of your own children to the needs of all students in your school. We are all a part of the Fresno Unified School District and we need to look for ways to improve the lives of our children throughout the district.

Remember, by taking an active role in your children's education, you ensure that they will be successful in the years to come. Also, by becoming a member of the PTA or Parent Group at your local school, and working together, we will all make a difference in education, at the school site and throughout all of Fresno Unified School District.

## Superintendent's Message



**Walt Buster, Ed.D.**  
Interim Superintendent of Schools

The Fresno Unified School District is living in a time of challenge and change. During the next few months, the board will begin a process to select a permanent superintendent.

The candidate who accepts the position will need the support of parents, students, educators and the business community in order to meet all the opportunities facing the district.

The primary focus on the district must be on teaching and learning. That is the single mission of the Fresno Unified School District. The new leader will need our support in maintaining a focus on the needs of all students. Certainly, the economic

conditions of the district will be a factor in the direction of the district. The work that is being done now with the Fresno County Office of Education and outside auditors to review the district's budget will help as future plans are made to wisely expend dollars in the best interests of students.

There is a way that all of us can help during this period of change: be optimistic. We have many challenges, but there are dedicated teachers and school employees who have given their professional experience helping children in Fresno; they deserve our appreciation. We have bond money for new schools; we need to spend it wisely. We have schools with improving test scores; we need to encourage them to continue on that path. There are new arrivals to America eager to participate in our public schools; we need to welcome them and give them our support.

This is the time to put aside differences and begin to design a wonderful future for the children in Fresno.

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# Crops are Harvested at Turner Garden Growing Center



A 5<sup>th</sup> grader at Turner Elementary School, top left, shows off the tomatoes he has helped nurture in the school's garden. The student is a member of the school's Horticulture Club. Two 5<sup>th</sup> graders shows off the salsa the club members made from the ripe tomatoes and peppers grown in the garden. Above right, a student displays the beautiful hot peppers that give the salsa its spice. Club advisor Lance Omeje, above left with students, says the garden helps the students hone their math, science, writing and public speaking skills as well as developing green thumbs. At top right is a 1st grade student checking on her classes tomatoes.



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Annie, Fall Musical  
August 23, 2004 6:00 pm

Alice in Wonderland, Ballet  
October 19, 2004 1:30 pm

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AGES 10 - 16 PARTNER DANCING AND MANNERS



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# District focuses on Special Education Measure K

Leaders of Fresno Unified School District along with parents and advocates of special education knew something had to be done to bring the District's special education programs into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Late in 2003, in a project initiated by the community, the Community Citizens' Advisory Committees for the Improvement of Special Education developed the "Aiming High" program, which will be used as a guideline for the next several years.

"It was a special project initiated by the community to better serve students," said Dr. Kendra Rosander, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education.

"It was a re-look at the whole (special education) process and out of that stakeholders came up with this document."

The entire Aiming High document can be viewed on the District's web site at [www.fresnounified.org](http://www.fresnounified.org).

The committees' vision, which was adopted

as the school District's vision, was to create "a learning environment that inspires in our students and families the passion and the power to make positive life choices by becoming architects of their future."

The District's mission as adopted in Aiming High is "to provide an educational program with high expectations for all to learn the academic, social and emotional skills needed to become lifelong learners."

According to Rosander, Aiming High is a living document that can be modified following continuing input from stakeholders. It provides a checklist for educators, parents and stakeholders to use as a prompt to "provide a clear and consistent process to be used Districtwide. It also should provide informed consent to the parents and students."

Rosander said the 14 specific recommendations outlined in Aiming High should guarantee a high level of

accountability for the District's special education programs.

For instance, she noted, Recommendation No. 4 will "Develop/amend an 'Accountability Plan' with benchmarks related to legal compliance and student progress as well as provide data related to needed improvements."

And, she said, one of the biggest goals is to re-establish the bonds of trust between the concerned parents and the school District.

The Aiming High document also underscores that school personnel will embrace parents as partners in the educational process and will continually work on building trust.

"This sends a clear message that we will work to establish a culture of respect and an attitude of acceptance throughout our District," Rosander said. She intends to see that message communicated by her entire staff.

Continued from Page 1

Recognition" to the school district. Sen. Barbara Boxer's representative brought the senator's commendation to the ceremony. Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes's representative gave a California State Flag to the new school as part of the ground breaking ceremonies.

The support from federal and state representatives provided the right opening for the ceremony, which was marked by the recognition of both the service to the community of Akira Yokomi and his family, and the revitalization that a new school provides for the multicultural community in downtown Fresno.

In fact, one District official who spoke on the significance of the Akira Yokomi Elementary School commended the hard work to bring the project together. The official explained that the new school was the District's "recognition of the multilingual, multicultural schools in America."

They also acknowledged the importance of the Yokomi family and community effort to bring together resources to make the school possible. It was their dreams and ingenuity, they said, that not only brought the promise of a school but also the financial backing for that school. In short, the official praised the project as undisputable evidence of the vibrancy, life, and fiber of our community.

Yokomi Elementary will enjoy strong community partnerships with Community Hospital, Fresno County's First 5, San Joaquin River Conservation Trust, the Fresno Discovery Center and many others with a major science component.

Richard Johanson was instrumental in helping the community develop the finances to build the school. Johanson congratulated the community for its hard work.

Ernie Doizaki, nephew of Akira Yokomi, introduced the Yokomi family, whose efforts were important to bringing together funding for the school.

## CART Robotics Team receives Rookie Award

In Atlanta, the International US FIRST robotics competition brought together 900 teams from 27 competitions in Canada, Brazil, Great Britain, and the United States. It was tough competition for the Center for Advanced Research and Technology (CART) robotics team. Nonetheless, inspired and anxious for the challenge, our CART students took the Rookie Inspiration Award at the international Atlanta competition and All-Star Rookie Award at the regional competition in San Jose. The host of competitions, US FIRST ([www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org)), is an organization that is itself dedicated to the promotion of



science, technology and innovation for the future.

The CART robotics team, led by Monica Au the school engineering instructor, spent six weeks developing their robot for the competition. Mrs. Au emphasized that the project "taught the students teamwork, work ethics, initiative, and the importance of collaboration and perseverance." These skills, according to Mrs. Au, "are more important to both students and school than the Rookie Inspiration Award itself."

The next competition will be held at the first of the year 2005. Other Fresno Unified schools will now participate thanks to the success of the CART students.

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## Preparing for the New Year

Tony Ramirez, an 8-year veteran of the Fresno Unified School District's Transportation Department, washes Bus 8 in preparation for the influx of thousands of students who are on a traditional track and who will be returning to classes on August 23rd.

In photo at right, Ramirez scrubs the bus assuring it will be clean as a whistle for the soon-to-begin traditional school year. Bus 8 is one of the newer 78 student buses put into service in 1990.



## McLane High has many mentors from law firm

In an effort to make the community a better place to live for all, the staff at McCormick Barstow has rolled up its sleeves and adopted McLane High School as a partner. Although it is one of the oldest partnerships in Fresno Unified School District, the attorneys and staff at McCormick Barstow have adopted an 11-page plan for the coming school year that they, and McLane leaders, believe will enhance the partnership.

"Our goal is not to change the lives of all 2,500 McLane students. Our goal is to have a positive impact on as many students as we can," said attorney Mike Wilhelm, who coordinates the partnership for McCormick Barstow.

"It's a tremendous learning experience for our students," said McLane Principal Frank Sylvestro. "It's a wonderful thing to see. It works because they (McCormick Barstow staff) care."

McCormick Barstow will form into teams that will assist McLane teachers and students in the areas of Academic Decathlon, Character Education, Mock Trial, The Rose Program (mentoring girls), a rummage sale, reading with students, bringing speakers to campus, job shadowing, scholarships for graduating seniors and an Art Hop Show. The firm also will have a team assisting the coordinator for the Center for Advanced Research and Technology.

The partnership is a model for other business leaders

to establish in Fresno Unified. Over three years ago, the Fresno Business Council's Education Committee determined that the most effective way for the business community to have a positive impact

on the education of students in the area was to establish partnerships with schools.

"We recognize that we cannot solve every problem that exists in education, but we can take steps to make the overall situation better," Wilhelm said.

In 2003, a joint task force was formed between the Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, the State Center Consortium, the Fresno Compact and the Fresno Business Council (Task Force) for the sole purpose of promoting and forming school business partnerships.

Wilhelm told the Human Resources Managers Association in June that his firm chose McLane High because of the major challenges the school faces, but that all Fresno Unified schools face challenges of varying degrees.

"A high percentage of our students today come from backgrounds so different from mine that it was as if we came from different worlds.

"I was talking to a first grade teacher several weeks ago who told me about her students and the very challenged backgrounds from which they come. Many of her kids come from homes with one or none of the parents living with them; homes where drugs and violence are commonplace; homes where kids have never had anyone read to them; homes where kids have never had anyone say the alphabet or count to 10 with them in any language. Kids who come from homes where there is no encouragement to achieve anything in school; kids who often aren't living with either parent.

The challenges facing both the staff and students at McLane are huge. Half of the school population is transient and turns over every year. A mere 20 percent of the incoming freshmen will be at McLane four years later. The area has the lowest per capita income of any high school district in the city.

Despite this, Wilhelm said the teachers and administrators at McLane "are very positive about their students. They believe the students have tremendous untapped potential. The students just lack a lot of life experience and a bigger world view. They do not see their lives as a series of opportunities." The people from McCormick Barstow who participate in the partnership hope to be that role model.

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### Health Center offers free services

With traditional school beginning August 23 don't forget the Student Health Center offers FUSD students free immunizations and free sports physicals. Students entering kindergarten must have their immunizations current along with 1st grade students needing a physical. The Student Health Center is located at 3058 N. Millbrook (just south of Shields). For an appointment call 248-7380.

The Mobile Health Center will be visiting schools in the upcoming months. They offer free well child physicals, sport physicals, immunizations, dental screening, as well as Medi-Cal and Healthy Families pre-enrollment. For more information or to schedule an appointment call 457-6062. The Mobile Health Center is a collaborative project of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative and the Fresno Unified School District's Department of Health Services.

# Every school day counts:

Attendance is an important part of education

Fresno Unified School District makes a concerted effort to deal with attendance problems early in a student's academic career. In fact, officials have learned that the earlier they can alleviate attendance problems, the better for the child, the family, the school and the community.

"We understand that truancy is a gateway to juvenile delinquency. Attendance problems are a quick indicator that something is going on (in the child's life)," said Bob Pankratz, Executive Director of Student Services.

Except for a slight setback in 1998-99, Fresno Unified has improved attendance incrementally to a high of 94.7 percent at the high school level from a low of about 88 percent seven years ago.

In fact, of the eight largest public school districts in California, FUSD has the third best record of keeping kids in the classroom.

That improvement is due to a laundry list of programs implemented to keep kids in school, according to Robert Harris, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services.

Harris said the perception that attendance is about money is correct – the state pays based on Average Daily Attendance – but the District's motivations go much deeper.

"As taxpayers, it is our responsibility to have a well, safe community that is accountable and responsible," Harris said. "We're obligated to provide that service for them."

A person's "life record" of accountability

begins with school attendance. "The state prison system is full of people with a record of poor school attendance," he said.

Benita Washington, District Coordinator for Student Services, noted the benefits of school attendance.

"If a kid attends school on a regular basis, it gives them more choices in life," she said. "It's bigger than our school district. It affects the entire community."

Poverty, a broken family unit and illicit drugs are community problems, and they are also major causes of student absences.

The community effect has been the focus for the District's numerous programs, all designed to keep children in the classroom. A number of those programs deal with students' mental and physical well-being as well as family issues.

"We're a responsive district," Washington said. "It benefits the whole (community) when all student needs are addressed. If a child is hungry, or ill, he or she can't focus on academics."

Harris said the District often targets the person most responsible for attendance problems, the parent.

"It's an easy decision to keep your child home from school," he said. "It's a difficult decision to get your child to school."

"Sometimes we have to give the parent a plan. Sometimes we have to be like the big brother and help them develop the skills to make the right decision."

# 98.9 softly rocks kids to school

Every day counts and soft rock 98.9's Brady and Rose have joined forces with the Fresno Unified School District to increase attendance in grades kindergarten through 8th grade. Attendance incentive prizes will be awarded to classrooms and individual students based on most improved attendance now through the end of the school year. For more information check out Soft Rock's website at [www.softrock989.com](http://www.softrock989.com). Make sure you're at your desk each day, ready to do your best.



# Math teachers achieve success using new space-age calculator

July was an exciting week of Algebra 1 and Algebra 2 technology activities for 56 middle and high school mathematics teachers from Fresno Unified, Sanger, San Joaquin Memorial, Central Unified, Dinuba, Westside, and Hanford. The math teachers focused their skills on the various aspects of using the TI-84+ Silver Edition, the newest calculator from Texas Instruments.

Activities included using the CBR motion detector to measure the bounce height of various sizes and types of balls, using the CBL's light sensor probe to gather data on the light-distance from source-relationship, and learning how to download applications from the Texas Instrument's website to the calculator for use in the classroom.

Along with learning new real-world activities with the calculator to enhance algebraic instruction, the teachers also were shown how to use the handheld as a demonstration model when a classroom set of calculators was not feasible. The instructors modeled appropriate use of educational technology for the institute participants. The T<sup>3</sup> (Teachers Teaching with Technology) instructors, Duane Olson from Washington, and Joyce Lee from Georgia, have been instructing teachers on handhelds for many years and they said our teachers were very enthusiastic.

Thank you, teachers, for a wonderful week, and for taking your vacation time to upgrade your skills.



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