



Dear Mountain Neighbor and Lakeside Parent,

Rural values and our mountain schools seem to be under attack. The Santa Clara County Committee on School District Organization on July 21, 2008 asked staff to place an item on the next meeting agenda to consider the viability of the Lakeside Joint School District. According to the *San Jose Mercury News* on-line, "The board plans to explore options for reorganizing the districts at its next board meeting. It will look into whether the Lakeside School District is still viable in terms of its size."

The County Committee on School District Organization is empowered by the California Education Code to unilaterally determine if a school should be reorganized and place such a measure on a public ballot. Smaller school districts are called "direct service" districts because of the close relationship they enjoy with the County Office of Education. There are five direct service districts in Santa Clara County, three of them are located in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

In our mountain community, reorganization was investigated in 1960, 1965, 1967, and 1972. These unification attempts failed. The 1972 study resulted in a reorganization measure being placed on the ballot affecting Lakeside, Loma Prieta, Los Gatos Union, and portions of Los Gatos Joint Union HSD. The measure failed in each affected community, and by a margin of 3:1 in the two mountain districts. In 1990 a study completed independently from the County Committee by Lakeside, Loma Prieta, Saratoga Union, Los Gatos Union, and the Los Gatos-Saratoga Joint Union High School District failed to result in a recommendation to bring the issue to a ballot again.

Lakeside School serves as the community center to the mountain region stretching from Hwy 17 to Hwy 9. Research shows that when schools close, local communities deteriorate (Rincones, 1988).

As school size increases, student achievement decreases; according to Stanford University, 30 years of research shows that four factors consistently affect student achievement – smaller school size; smaller class size; challenging curriculum; highly qualified teachers (Linda Darling-Hammond, 1998). These characteristics tend to be the hallmark of Santa Cruz Mountain schools. As school size increases, the more resources are spent on things outside the classroom. The percent of the budget spent on teachers, books, and teaching materials actually decreases as district size increases (Cox, 2002).

The unilateral consideration of the reorganization of the Lakeside Joint School District by the County Committee on School District Organization would set a dangerous precedent for future unilateral reorganization efforts in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Remember Joni Mitchell's admonition: "Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone."

Get involved with your local mountain school. They are worth keeping and worth fighting for.

Bob Chrisman
Mountain Resident and Lakeside School Principal,
December 30, 2009.