

LAKESIDE JOINT SCHOOL DISTRICT



From: Board of Trustees

December 23, 2016

Lakeside Families,

At the last board meeting there was a great discussion of the plans for our middle school students for the 2017-2018 school year and the needs for some additional clarity. The Lakeside Board of Trustees would like to take this opportunity to clarify plans and strategy for middle school education for Lakeside students.

To be clear, **we intend to continue the middle school program next year just as it has been this year and the years before**: current 6th and 7th graders will continue at their current middle schools, and in February the current 5th graders will choose whether to attend Rolling Hills or CT English for the 2017-2018 school year. Assuming Lakeside continues as a district, we expect that program to continue, and that students already enrolled in a middle school can continue at that school through 8th grade.

In addition to understanding the Board of Trustees intent, we would like to share the details of the current situation and the how we are addressing it. For the past 5-6 years, Lakeside students have had the option of attending either CT English or Rolling Hills middle school, under the terms of written agreements (“MOUs”) between Lakeside and the Campbell and Loma Prieta school districts. Lakeside pays those districts for each middle school student we send there. These arrangements have benefited the students, as well as all three school districts. Both Campbell and Loma Prieta have been very accommodating in negotiating the MOUs and have consistently strived to do what is best for all the students, both theirs and ours. The MOUs have generally been written for 3 year periods and have provided that even if an MOU weren’t renewed, the students already enrolled at a school would be able to complete middle school at that school.

As you probably know, Lakeside was hit with some serious financial challenges beginning last year. The combination of a steep increase in expenses and the imminent expiration of the parcel tax passed in 2010 threatens the very existence of the Lakeside district. As it is obligated to do, the Lakeside board looked at every conceivable option for how to address the financial crisis. This included changing the middle school program in order to reduce costs, one option being to revert to the pre-2012 arrangement and only send students to Rolling Hills, since CT English is somewhat more expensive. This was only one of many cost-reduction measures that were considered in early 2016. An immediate decision regarding middle school choice was avoided when the MOU with Loma Prieta was renegotiated to provide a lower payment rate for the 2016-2017 school year in the event that the parcel tax isn’t renewed.

The hope -- expectation -- was that the parcel tax would pass in June 2016 and Lakeside would continue to operate as it has for many years: very lean and efficiently, while providing an excellent education to our students, including the choice of middle schools. When the parcel tax

did not pass in June, the Board was faced with a new challenge. We have another opportunity and have put forth again a parcel tax measure that will adequately fund the district, but if that doesn't pass, realistically the Lakeside district will not be financially viable and will "go out of business." This letter isn't intended to go into details of what that would mean, but in some form Lakeside would merge into one or more of the surrounding school districts. Trying to continue to operate the district without a parcel tax would not provide the kind of education that the great majority of our residents expect for the children of the district, and therefore would not be the responsible thing to do. As the Board looked at these scenarios, it became clear that short-term cost-cutting measures such as reducing staff at Lakeside or *eliminating middle school choice* **do not make sense**. These measures would delay the financial reckoning by only a few months at most, and in the meantime substantially impact the education of our students.

Therefore, the Board has discussed and agreed that our strategy will be to maintain the current educational program for all Lakeside students, including middle schoolers. If the parcel tax passes in March 2017 we will have the funding to continue this program into the future. If the parcel tax does not pass, the district will burn through its reserves pretty quickly, but the multi-year budget projections show that there will be sufficient money to last through the 2017-2018 school year. Without a parcel tax the district will be broke soon after that so will need to complete a merger in that time frame in any case.

Note that as of today the MOU with Loma Prieta does not extend past the current school year. But we have begun negotiations to renew the MOUs, and both Loma Prieta and Campbell have indicated that they want to renew under essentially the same terms. Given our past experience, there is no reason to expect that these MOUs won't be renewed. Also note that this letter is intended to clarify the strategy and thinking of the Board and the current budget situation. It cannot legally bind the Board in the future; the middle school program has evolved in the past, and may well do so in the future, based on input from the community and what is best for the students. But we want to dispel the fear that the middle school choice is going to disappear this year as a consequence of our financial crisis. Lastly, this Board cannot say what the middle school program would be after a merger, in the event the parcel tax does not pass. All of the districts into which Lakeside would likely merge have very good middle school programs, and the merger negotiations would most definitely include discussion of how to minimize the disruption to Lakeside students, but ultimately the decisions would be made by the board(s) of the other district(s).

It's understood that the financial uncertainties have made this year particularly confusing. It's hoped that this letter clarifies the situation regarding middle school, but if you are left with questions or concerns, please contact Superintendent Lisa Gonzales or Board President Les Niles.

Thank you for your support of Lakeside!

/s/ Board of Trustees
Lakeside Joint School District