

## **THE LITTLE SCHOOL DISTRICT THAT DOES**

### ***SUMMARY***

One half million students attend 649 public schools in San Diego County. The Lakeside Union School District, like many of the counties older school districts, has an aging population, rapidly rising real estate values and low population growth. These conditions result in declining school enrollment, as well as declining revenue to the school district. The increasing demands of education, costs of labor, books, supplies, fuel, and utilities further compound fiscal problems for all school districts.

During our initial visit to the district office Grand Jury members were made aware of some of the issues facing many school districts in San Diego County. We became interested in Lakesides approach to the problems and their solutions.

This report is an overview of the Lakeside Union School District.

### ***PURPOSE***

The purpose of this study is to show a snapshot of a relatively small school district as it copes with declining enrollment and budget cuts from the State of California.

### ***PROCEDURES EMPLOYED***

Members of the Grand Jury visited several Lakeside schools. They included the River Valley Charter High School, the East County Academy of Learning, Lakeside and Tierra Del Sol Middle Schools and Lakeside Farms Elementary. We interviewed school board members, the former district superintendent, the interim district superintendent, school administrators, teachers and students.

We observed elementary and middle school classrooms, industrial arts, and Practical Living Skills (Home Economics) facilities as well as outdoor physical education areas. We saw television broadcasting equipment set-up at one middle school.

The Grand Jury reviewed the Lakeside District web site, received budget and other statistical information from the district administration and gathered information from the California Department of Education web site.

### ***DISCUSSION***

There are 42 individual school districts in San Diego County. The districts range in size from as few as 250 students to 141,000 students. All together, one-half million students attend 649 public schools in the County.

Lakeside Union School District is located about 20 miles northeast of downtown San Diego. It covers 75 square miles of unincorporated, semi-rural area with a population of

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60,000. The Barona Indian Reservation, resort hotel and casino are located within the district boundaries.

In many ways the Lakeside community demographics are not representative of San Diego County. It is predominantly white, non-Hispanic with a very small African American population. The percentage of Native American population is double that of the county average. The percentage of persons over 25 with high school education is near the county average but persons with a bachelor's degree or higher is well below. The average household income is slightly above the county average while real estate values are below.

The Lakeside Union School budget for FY 2003-04 is \$860,000 less than for FY 2002-03. This combined with increased anticipated expenditures, resulted in the District's budget surplus decreasing from 6.3 million to 4.9 million dollars.

There are approximately 5000 students enrolled in Lakeside Union's nine schools. The district provides education grades K through 12. El Capitan High School is physically located in Lakeside but is a part of the Grossmont Union High School District. In 1997 an unsuccessful attempt was made to integrate El Capitan into Lakeside. Students who finish the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the Lakeside school district and do not choose to apply to the charter high school are enrolled in the Grossmont District.

High school education is limited to approximately 120 students who attend the River Valley Charter High School. An additional fifty 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students also attend River Valley.

At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, the district was faced with closing one of its elementary schools. Instead of boarding up the buildings and paying a state imposed fine for having a vacant school, the district contracted with several of the surrounding school districts to provide special education facilities for diploma bound students. These special education students have the cognitive ability to pass state and district graduation exams and are normally sent to non-public or private schools. The cost of providing this special education is borne by the contracting district. Because of proximity to nearby districts, savings in transportation costs and the availability of a facility, the Lakeside School District estimated there would be a considerable savings to both themselves and the contracting districts. For these reasons the East County Learning Academy was established.

The River Valley Charter High School is in its 7<sup>th</sup> year of operation. The charter allows home school time as part of the school curriculum. Each student uses the facility 50% of the time and has home schooling the other 50%. This allows the faculty to use the school facilities for two groups of students. The state had been funding the school at the full time Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rate for each student. The state changed the formula for allocation of ADA funds resulting in a loss of revenue.

The district runs preschool and after school care programs as well as spring break and summer camps. Lakeside has orchestra and band programs as well as shop and

homemaking classes in their two middle schools. These programs are sadly missing from many other school districts. Middle school students also produce a daily television news program that is broadcast to classrooms.

The Lakeside Union School District has no bonded indebtedness. With an income loss of almost a million dollars for the 2003-2004 year the district had to implement layoffs and cutbacks in services. It has been able to maintain its educational programs in spite of budgetary reductions. It must be noted that although the state only requires a budget reserve of 3%, the Lakeside school board has chosen to have a current reserve of nearly 18% while also issuing lay off notices. The Grand Jury questioned this decision and was informed that the board has a policy that restricts them from spending any more than \$500,000 per year from the reserve moneys.

Lakeside is an older school district with aging school buildings. Some buildings are over 6 decades old. Because of their outstanding maintenance and remodeling programs the buildings are in excellent repair and are not eligible for funds from the recently passed Proposition 55 School Bond. This bond provides funds to repair neglected school facilities. All school sites have handicap access and are technologically current with Internet access and closed circuit television in all classrooms.

In addition to regular classroom curriculum activities, we observed a special science day program at one school. Part of the science program included a professional presentation sponsored by the P.T.A. A Renaissance Faire was taking place at another school. Lakeside Middle School offers an Agriculture Science class that meets the state science requirements. This course may be especially interesting for students in a rural community.

The Jury made extensive use of Lakeside's web site while gathering information about the district. In addition, State of California web sites were also used to gain statistical information. Formal interviews of staff at the district offices and various school sites provided us with additional facts about special programs.

While visiting our questions were freely answered and we had the overall impression that the faculty and staff of the Lakeside Union School District were very proud of their district and the people who run it.

### ***FACTS AND FINDINGS***

- The district has 6 elementary schools, 2 middle schools and 1 charter high school. A second charter grade school is located on the Barona Indian Reservation. The Lakeside District is the sponsoring Local Education Agency but the charter school board does all school administration. One member of the Barona Indian Charter School Board is from the Lakeside School Board.
- District enrollment peaked at 5022 for the 2001-02 school year.

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- Enrollment had been flat for the 3 previous school years.
- Enrollment has declined in the past 2 years to its present level of 4871.
- River Valley Charter High School has an Academic Performance Index (API) rating of 823.
- Their API ranking earned River Valley a 10 on both the Similar School Ranking and the Statewide Ranking. Most of Lakeside's schools have a statewide API rank between 5 and 8. (On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being high)
- There are 5 designated Title 1 schools in Lakeside. This determination is for economically disadvantaged pupils. The Federal government provides extra funding for materials and support for these schools.
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes are offered at all class levels in the district. This program offers extra educational support for under represented student groups wishing to attend college. To ensure a smooth transition to the high school level there is very good communication between the Lakeside District and the Grossmont District AVID teachers.

### ***COMMENDATIONS***

The San Diego County Grand Jury commends:

- The students and teachers of River Valley Charter High School for the outstanding Academic Performance Index school rating.
- The P.T.A. and Lakeside community organizations for their involvement and support of the district's music and arts programs. These include "The Run for the Arts" and "The Festival of Arts".

### ***APPENDIX***

For further information visit the Lakeside Union School District website at:

<http://www.lsschools.k12.ca.us/lakeside/default.htm>