

From the Principal

October 29, 2007

Science Instruction in the Elementary Classroom

On October 24th, the San Francisco Examiner and several local newspapers ran a story about science instruction in the elementary classroom. The article reported findings recently completed by an independent research group. The findings centered on the small amount of time dedicated to science instruction in the elementary school classroom in California.

Following the printing of this article, I received a phone call from one of our parents. This parent was concerned about the lack of science instruction as reported in this article. I spent quite a bit of time reviewing the effective program offered by the Los Altos School District. Also, I shared the impact of Los Altos Education Foundation dollars has upon our program.

As a result of reviewing this recent article and my discussion with our concerned parent, I decided to share science news at Springer with our entire community.

First, let me share an excerpt from a article by Jonathan King, Professor of Molecular Biology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This article first appeared in Education Week on May 9, 2007.

“ To increase the competency , literacy, and skills of our students, we need to increase their exposure to active, inquiry-based classrooms. This is what was called for in the seminal “Science for All Americans” report of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.”

Professor King went on to say, *‘One goal of laboratory exercise was to train students to observe carefully. We asked them to draw what they saw. For many, profound questions emerged immediately from their direct observations.’*

Second, the goal of the LAEF funding of Science Specialists in the elementary schools of Los Altos promotes the investigation effort. For example, Springer has a classroom dedicated to hands-on science experimentation. The lab is staffed by our science specialist, Jayne Amsden. She collaborates and plans with each grade level to provide hands-on investigations that coordinate with classroom learning activities. Each grade level promotes journaling and science notebooks for students to record their findings.

Third, the Los Altos School District will be adopting new science materials this next year. Currently, teachers throughout the district are piloting these materials to make a selection based upon district established criteria. Our goal is to select the program that promotes investigation of grade level topics.

Each grade level has Earth Science, Physical Science and Life Science curriculum. How the information is learned will be a function of the materials and teacher training based upon how well the district philosophy is supported by the purchased program.

Fourth, Springer Elementary School has continued to emphasize the role of science through the Science Faire. Over the years, the Science Faire has encouraged all children to participate in a well designed investigation or experiment using the formal scientific process. Our Grade Six students are expected to participate in a major investigation. Many of our sixth grade students

also participate in the Synopsys Silicon Valley Science & Technology Championship.

Early classroom and home experiences with inquiry opportunities, investigation, experimentation, observation, and comparison have proven to be the key to developing inquisitive, creative young minds willing to take a chance to find alternatives. We need to value this learning approach.