



# APPLE PRESS

## In this issue

**Enrollment Growing Despite State Funding Woes**  
**Gravenstein Test Scores are Tops!**  
**Gravenstein Says "NO!"**  
**Our ENRICH! Program Grows Stronger**  
**Stay in Touch with Gravenstein**  
**The Music Never Ends at Gravenstein Schools**

Summer 2011

Gravenstein Union School District

[www.grav.k12.ca.us](http://www.grav.k12.ca.us)

## Gravenstein Enrollment Grows Despite State Funding Woes

*Superintendent's Report*

Most school districts have announced bad news in the last few years—teacher layoffs and cuts to the school year and student programs. **I am proud to announce that the Gravenstein Union School District plans to do none of the above!** We are committed to continuing our award-winning programs (*described elsewhere in this newsletter*). For the 2011-12 school year, our schools will serve approximately 680 students from Kindergarten through 8th grade—an increase of over 30% in the last four years.

**Because of our strong academics and innovative programs, Gravenstein and Hillcrest are both California Distinguished Schools. In addition, last year Gravenstein School received the "California Business for Excellence in Education Award" as one of the top ten scholar schools in Sonoma County.**

Please check our website, [www.grav.k12.ca.us](http://www.grav.k12.ca.us), to view our Traditional Program offerings as well as our ENRICH! Creative Arts Magnet/GATE Program. We also have a district Pre-Kindergarten/

**Transitional Kindergarten is a new, tuition-free early childhood education program that builds a bridge between the preschool years and the traditional kindergarten curriculum.**

Preschool classroom and a district-operated before and after school daycare program. Our Preschool and daycare are both funded through parent fees.

More news—we now offer a **Transitional Kindergarten** class for students who are age-appropriate for Kindergarten but a little young, or socially or academically not ready, for the regular kindergarten class.

**Transitional Kindergarten is a new, tuition-free early childhood education program that builds a bridge between the preschool years and the traditional kindergarten curriculum. Please let me know if you have a child that could benefit from this free program for the 2011-12 school year.**

Four key factors make

Gravenstein's schools successful: 1) the best teachers we can hire; 2) the best state-approved educational programs available; 3) innovative programs that go beyond the core curriculum; and 4) lots of parent involvement and community support.

*Superintendent's Report (Continued on page 3)*

## Gravenstein Says "NO!"

Despite these tough economic times and a dismal state budget outlook, the Gravenstein school district proudly says "NO!..."

- NO teacher or staff layoffs!
- NO reduction in the school year!
- NO increase in class sizes!
- NO school closures!
- NO cuts to our award-winning music program!

- NO cuts to after-school sports!
- NO cuts to our Spanish language classes!
- NO reduction to our acclaimed ENRICH! Creative Arts / GATE magnet program!

Sure, we've made cuts—but away from the classroom, where they don't affect the great education our students receive. We've cut at the district level, not at our school sites. Our superintendent, Linda LaMarre, also serves as principal at Gravenstein Elementary School and runs our special education program, among others. Through hard work and

*Gravenstein Says "NO!" (Continued on page 2)*

## Gravenstein Test Scores are Tops!

At the Gravenstein Union School District, we strive for outstanding student achievement. **For eight of the last nine years, our students have earned the top test scores in the West County**—a prime indicator of our successful academic program. These tests measure student progress in mastering the content and concepts in California's rigorous state educational standards.

Great education depends first and foremost on a great teaching staff, and our district strives to hire and nurture the best teachers. As our enrollment has grown in recent years, and some of our senior teachers have taken well-earned retirement, we've worked hard to hire exceptional educators and give them the tools and training they need to succeed. Despite reduced state funding, we've continued to provide our students with current, state-approved textbooks and materials. Our teachers attend workshops and training to help sharpen their skills and share best practices with their

*Test Scores are Tops (Continued on page 3)*



*We offer an academic preschool and our new Transitional Kindergarten*



The *Apple Press* is published by the **Gravenstein Union School District**

**District Office**

3840 Twig Avenue  
Sebastopol, CA 95472 — 823-7008  
*Linda LaMarre, Superintendent*

**Gravenstein Elementary School**

3840 Twig Avenue  
Sebastopol, CA 95472 — 823-5361  
*Linda LaMarre, Principal*

**Hillcrest Middle School**

725 Bloomfield Road  
Sebastopol, CA 95472 — 823-7653  
*David Fichera, Principal and Performing Arts Director*

**Board of Trustees**

*Jim Horn President*  
*Sandra Wickland Clerk*  
*Kay Crocker Trustee*  
*Jeff Weaver Trustee*  
*Jan Zlotnick Trustee*

**[www.grav.k12.ca.us](http://www.grav.k12.ca.us)**

## Our Traditional & ENRICH! Programs Grow Stronger

Parents enrolling their students in the Gravenstein school district have two great choices—our traditional program and our ENRICH! Creative Arts / GATE program.

Our traditional program offers a rigorous, standards-based education with low class sizes, experienced and dedicated teachers, and current textbooks and materials. All students can participate in our full music program (see accompanying article for details).

Thanks to generous support from the Gravenstein Schools Foundation, traditional students receive arts enrichment from “Artist in the Classroom” Nancy Ricciardi, regular Spanish instruction at the middle school level, and additional classroom support. Students benefit from a progressive range of academic field trips

and extracurricular activities, including an overnight trip to the Monterey Bay Aquarium and a weeklong outdoor education trip to Yosemite.

Parents also can apply for the ENRICH!

Creative Arts / GATE magnet program for their students. As a GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program, ENRICH! is limited to students with an interest or aptitude for creative arts as well as “proficient” or higher test scores. The ENRICH! school day is longer, and the academic pace quicker, than in our traditional classrooms. In addition to the rigorous academic curriculum and the broad array of

music, art and extracurricular activities available to our traditional students, ENRICH! students enjoy additional arts and science enrichment classes and academic field trips, thanks to the generous support of our parent-led Magnet Program Foundation.



*7th grade ENRICH! Students study Shakespeare and visit the Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon*

## Gravenstein Says “NO!”

*(Continued from page 1)*

strong leadership, we’ve improved our special education services while reducing costs. In addition, we’ve cut bus transportation expenses by more than 70%.

As a result of these cost savings and our growing student enrollment, we’ve maintained our excellent schools, hired and retained great teachers, and grown our acclaimed ENRICH! Creative Arts / GATE magnet program. We’ve been able to do this in the face of state funding cuts that, unfortunately, could grow even worse.

That’s one reason our enrollment has grown more than 30% in the last four years, and why parents living in 20 of Sonoma County’s 40 school districts have chosen to bring their students to Gravenstein and Hillcrest schools.

So when you hear about school closures, teacher layoffs and a shortened school year, just remember—Gravenstein says “NO!”

## Stay in Touch with Gravenstein!

**Visit our District and parent foundation websites and follow us on Facebook!**

At Gravenstein, we believe our community has a right to know what’s happening in our public schools. That’s why we offer several different ways for you to learn more about our district and stay in touch with the latest news.

Begin at our district website ([www.grav.k12.ca.us](http://www.grav.k12.ca.us)). You can find information about upcoming events, school calendars, District budgets and finances, policies and procedures, and more. We also have links to our teachers’ websites and blogs. We update the site frequently to keep you informed about your local schools. In addition, we will be making a big email push to stay in contact with our Gravenstein “alumni” parents.

You can also find us on Facebook—just follow the link on our website’s home

page. We frequently post news and photos of interest to our students, parents and community.

Finally, you can visit the websites of our two wonderful parent foundations, the Gravenstein Schools Foundation ([www.gravenstein-schools.org](http://www.gravenstein-schools.org)) and the Gravenstein Schools Magnet Program Foundation ([www.gravenstein-mpf.org](http://www.gravenstein-mpf.org)). These groups provide invaluable support to our students and schools as well as organizing fun events for our community. Both groups are tax-exempt 501(c)3 charitable organizations and welcome your donations and support.

So don’t be a stranger—visit us soon!

# The Music Never Ends at Gravenstein Schools!

Despite significant state funding cuts over the last several years, Gravenstein has been able to grow its music and performing arts program into one of Sonoma County's strongest. Under the inspired tutelage of our Performing Arts Director, David Fichera, we offer all of our students an impressive array of instruction and activities:

- Regular music instruction for all Gravenstein Elementary students (grades K-5)
- Two bands at the 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grade level—a Beginning Band with more than 70 members and an Intermediate Band with more than 50 members
- A 6<sup>th</sup> grade band with nearly 60 students
- A 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade band with over 100 students
- A Jazz Band and a Strings Ensemble for 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade students



*Our Hillcrest marching band has won first prize at the Rose Parade two years in a row*

- A Marching Band comprised of over 150 students in 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades. A frequent winner of our local Apple Blossom Parade, our

Marching Band has won Santa Rosa's Rose Parade two years in a row, along with impressive showings by our drum major, flag team and letter ID unit.

- An annual school play with more than 60 students in the cast and crew. Past productions have included *Beauty & The Beast*, *Guys & Dolls*, and *The Music Man*.

At Gravenstein, music and performing arts are "cool"—two-thirds of our 4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> graders participate. The District provides most of the funding for our programs, but our two parent foundations help as well. Together we ensure that our students receive a complete education—rigorous academic instruction as well as excellent creative and performing arts education.

## Gravenstein Test Scores are Tops

*(Continued from page 1)*

peers. Thanks to prudent fiscal management, we've had no teacher layoffs in these tough economic times—a rarity in California. Advanced student learning also depends on committed and involved parents. Our district is blessed with hundreds of parent volunteers who assist in our classrooms, organize school community activities and raise thousands of dollars every year to support and enhance our students' education. Our parents provide crucial additional financial support through two non-profit groups—the Gravenstein Schools Foundation and the Magnet Program Foundation. Both groups are run by parent-elected boards. Together, they raise more than

\$200,000 annually to support Gravenstein's creative arts, music, Spanish, outdoor education and science programs. Now more than ever, school districts must rely on strong administrative teams that maintain steady leadership in the face of conflicting regulations, dwindling resources and financial uncertainty. During the last ten years, we've increased student enrollment nearly 40%, maintained prudent reserves, improved student test scores, and nurtured our growing ENRICH! Creative Arts/GATE magnet program. Superintendent LaMarre and her team have worked cooperatively with our professional teaching staff and supportive parents to provide a great education for Gravenstein students.

## Superintendent's Report

*(Continued from page 1)*

Teacher hiring is one of our most important tasks. We review hundreds of resumes annually and select only the very best teachers we can find.

Our parent foundations, MPF and GSF, help maintain many of our programs even though the state has made significant cuts. Parents support art, music, band, drama, Spanish language instruction and field trips for students, and they volunteer in our classrooms and on school committees.

Without a doubt, state funding cuts to education have hurt our district—but we have made our cuts as far away from the classroom as possible. For example, our administrators wear many hats and fill many jobs. In addition to being district superintendent, I am also principal of Gravenstein School and Director for Special Education, Instructional Materials, Transportation and Insurance. The principal at Hillcrest Middle School is also the Director of our Performing Arts Program. Members of our school board provide professional and other services free of charge to help the district.

Everyone pitches in, but three years of state budget cuts have made it increasingly difficult to maintain the excellent education our students must have to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The expiration of our former parcel tax has only made matters worse.

***Therefore, I am appealing to our parents and our local community—please donate \$36 (or more!) to replace the money that our parcel tax would have provided from every household in our District.***

Politics don't matter—this is about providing the best education possible for our children. I think we have proven that we are accountable by maintaining high test scores, offering more than just the core academic subjects, and balancing our budgets.

Please help preserve our outstanding neighborhood schools that Realtors brag about to potential homeowners. With your help, we can have **accountability** and **local control** over the education of our children.

**If you decide to donate to your local school district, please make your check out to "GUSD."** Thank you for any amount you can afford and for your continuing support for our children.

*Linda J. LaMarre*



# APPLE PRESS

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
SEBASTOPOL, CA  
95472  
PERMIT NO. 59

3840 Twig Avenue Sebastopol, CA 95472

[www.grav.k12.ca.us](http://www.grav.k12.ca.us)

## News Flash!

Gravenstein schools attract students from 20 of Sonoma County's 40 school districts!

Find out why! Contact Linda LaMarre at 707.823.7008 or email her at [llamarre@grav.k12.ca.us](mailto:llamarre@grav.k12.ca.us)



*Despite significant state funding cuts over the last several years, Gravenstein has been able to grow its Music and Performing Arts program into one of Sonoma County's strongest. We offer regular music instruction to all students, six different bands, a strings ensemble, and our annual Hillcrest School play. More than 2/3 of our 4th through 8th graders participate in band and performing arts!*

### Gravenstein Elementary Highlights

- Class Size Reduction in grades K-3
- **Highest District API score in the West County for eight of the last nine years**
- Art and Music Programs and 4th & 5th bands
- **On-site Academic Preschool**
- Extended Day Kindergarten and On-site Daycare
- **California Distinguished School**
- Before school Spanish instruction
- **Strong Academics and Creative Arts**
- **ENRICH! creative arts / GATE magnet program for grades K-5**

### Hillcrest Middle School Highlights

- Rigorous academic emphasis including advanced Mathematics and Lab Science
- **Highest Middle School API score in the West County**
- California Distinguished School
- **Full music program—6th, 7th & 8th grade bands, a jazz band—and a strings ensemble!**
- Active intramural and countywide sports and activities programs
- **ENRICH! creative arts / GATE magnet program for grades 6-8**
- Before and After School Programs including Sports, Art, Drama, Tutoring and Jazz Band
- **Spanish language instruction for all students**