



# school bulletin

ISSUED BI-WEEKLY SEPTEMBER THROUGH JUNE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Oct. 16, 2015

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE –** The Poly High School Chamber Orchestra, directed by Andy Osman, was one of several music and dance groups from local schools to perform during the Council of the Great City Schools 59th Annual Fall Conference in Long Beach. Poly's orchestra preceded speaker Fareed Zakaria of CNN.



## Long Beach Hosts Nation's Educators

More than 1,200 of the nation's big-city school leaders and educators exchanged their best strategies during the Council of the Great City Schools 59th Annual Fall Conference held last week in Long Beach.

About 75 discussion sessions focused on topics such as equity and equality in education, Common Core Standards and teacher effectiveness, all tied to the conference theme of Sailing to Success in Urban Education. Student musicians and dancers provided numerous performances throughout the conference, while student artists supplied an exhibit of paintings depicting their favorite places in the city. Several educators from the Long Beach Unified School District presented at the conference, which was attended by educators from more than 60 school systems.

Speakers at the conference included former NASA astronaut Jose M. Hernandez and CNN anchor Fareed Zakaria. Hernandez shared a compelling story of how one teacher positively impacted his life, helping him overcome tough odds as a child of migrant farm workers.

"My story is not unique. There are a lot of stories like mine in your school districts," Hernandez told educators during a packed session at the Hyatt Regency. "You educators make a big difference. I'm a product of the public school system. The system works, and it's only because you take the time to change the trajectory of so many families."

CNN's Zakaria warned against narrow comparisons with other nations based on test scores such as the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) scores. Though the United States has not ranked highly on the tests, he said, the U.S. is "the most successful country in the history of the world." He said that American schools should focus less on emulating schools in other countries, and focus

more on the qualities of innovation and creativity that have made this nation successful.

"The answer for American education, most importantly, is being more like ourselves," Zakaria said.

LBUSD Board of Education President Felton Williams is president-elect of the Council of the Great City Schools, which is the nation's primary coalition of large, urban school districts. As one of the presenters at the conference, Williams joined LBUSD Superintendent Christopher J. Steinhauser and Head Counselor Kimberley Johnson of the Equity, Access/College and Career Readiness Office in explaining how the school district has significantly expanded student access to Advanced Placement college prep courses.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, stated in a note to Williams and Steinhauser that the conference was his organization's best ever:

"I am writing to thank you and the city of Long Beach once more for the extraordinary welcome you showed conferees last week at the annual conference of the Great City Schools. And I thank you for the tremendous effort you put forward in hosting and organizing the meeting. It appeared to us that everything came off flawlessly. The table and room decorations were fabulous; the student entertainment ranks among the best we have seen or heard anywhere; the transportation to the Queen Mary was great; the volunteers were invaluable; and the bands were wonderful. Even the weather cooperated. The reception with your mayor, former mayor and other city leaders was a special treat. And, the students you provided for the town hall meeting knocked everyone's socks off. Kudos, of course, go to Judy Seal (executive director of

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## Teachers of the Year Share Best Practices

Three outstanding Long Beach Unified School District teachers were recently selected as Teachers of the Year.

Julianne Beebe teaches English at Poly High School. Courtney Venema teaches fourth grade at Longfellow Elementary School. Michelle Fennell teaches history, drama, Spanish and physical education at John Muir Academy.

Venema earned the Los Angeles County Teacher of the Year honor and advances for consideration as California Teacher of the Year.

The three were honored at a recent Board of Education meeting, and at a Los Angeles County Office of Education luncheon along with other teachers from across the county.

Julianne Beebe begins each school year with a vivid simile.

"I imagine an enormous wooden ship, beached on white sand, with my new group of students and me heaving it into the ocean. We fearlessly jump on board and set out on the journey of our year together. And sometime just before winter break, we seem to hit smooth water, each of us owning our individual roles and coming together like an intricate human puzzle when necessary."

She remembers clearly the moment when she saw the possibilities of what she could accomplish in the classroom.

"The day I fell in love with the job was the day I watched my students trickle into class, stop by the cabinet to grab their writing journals, and begin responding to the daily prompt I had written on the board, without needing any verbal direction whatsoever. Suddenly it dawned on me that I had put a learning structure in place and my students were responding. Wow, I thought. What else could I train them to do? What else could I show them is possible?"

Her approach to teaching is guided by a simple observation.

"For years I've posted the following quote,

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**Beebe**



**Venema**



**Fennell**

## • Teachers of Year Challenge Their Students

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attributed to Plato, above my classroom door: 'Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.' My teaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that not only can every student learn, but that every student matters. So much about effective teaching hinges on making sure one's students feel validated and believe that they deserve to achieve."

Courtney Venema began her teaching career as a resource specialist without prior employment as a classroom teacher.

"I struggled, failed, learned and improved during my three and a half years in that position. Ultimately I believed that in order to be an effective support to students and teachers, I would need experience teaching a self-contained class."

Following that experience in a fourth grade classroom, she applied to become a GATE/EXCEL (gifted and accelerated) teacher to further challenge herself and become an even stronger teacher.

"Again, I found myself faced with a tough learning curve, but with time and professional development, I became more confident in my abilities to challenge advanced learners. It was during that time that I developed a passion for teaching gifted learners. I found that the way they thought and processed information was just as fascinating to me as students with learning disabilities. Meeting their educational needs was just as challenging as meeting the needs of students with an IEP, or students in a general education class."

Her own path in the profession has helped her to connect more easily with students.

"For every teacher, seeing student success and achievement is one of the greatest parts of the job. However, even more rewarding for me is seeing my students embrace and find joy in the challenges and messiness of learning. I love when they openly state that they are confused and need clarification, or they want a little more time to try to figure something out on their own before hearing from others."

She considers herself a lifelong learner and is fascinated with how people learn.

## Names in the News

Wilson Classical High School student **Breana Schroeder** was featured in a recent ABC-7 news story that detailed how the ninth grader overcomes some of her difficulties with cystic fibrosis through the therapeutic powers of surfing. Schroeder, who swims and surfs with a feeding tube, describes the salty ocean air as "kind of like a breathing treatment." She is one of the youngest ever to compete at the tandem surfing world championships.

**Curtis Heard**, choir director at Wilson Classical High School for 24 years, has composed dozens of choral works, along with pieces for solo voice and chamber ensembles, including three operas and two cantatas. October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard, his most ambitious work to date, will be presented at 7 p.m. Oct. 17 and at 5 p.m. Oct. 18 at First Congregational Church in Long Beach ([firstchurchlib.org](http://firstchurchlib.org)), and at 2 p.m. Oct. 25 at the Art Theater in Long Beach. Three choirs are involved: the First Congregational Church Sanctuary Choir, the South Coast Chorale and the Wilson High School Women's Chorus. Tickets are \$20 and available at the box office.

"I treat all students fairly and try to encourage them to treat others the same way. I am passionate about learning and challenging all of my students to do their best."

Michelle Fennell approached the classroom by knowing the kind of teacher she didn't want to become.

"As a young child, I would have told you that teaching would have been my last choice for a profession. Many of my teachers had little patience for my short attention span and day dreaming and had difficulty dealing with my kinesthetic learning style. I often felt overlooked and felt as though no one saw my potential. These experiences with teachers led me to view the teaching profession negatively."

But after some successful teaching experiences as a camp counselor during a summer vacation in high school, she changed her appraisal.

"As I entered my senior year and began to apply to college, I declared liberal studies as my major and planned to be the teacher that I had never had: a teacher that gives students multiple chances and never puts them down, a teacher who looks for strengths in all her pupils, and a teacher who takes a personal interest in her students."

Fennell follows through with precise accommodation to each student's way of learning. Her teaching relies on helping students to make the most of their opportunities.

"I want all students I teach to benefit from an outstanding education, and I challenge students to meet high expectations. I believe none of my students are average. They are all capable of greatness, and I push them to be the best, academically and socially. I feel a sense of accomplishment when my students achieve their best and are model citizens for the community around them."

## Classroom Grants

The Long Beach Jaycee Foundation is offering grants to teachers for classroom projects.

Grant applications are available at [lbjcfoundation.org](http://lbjcfoundation.org) for the MaryPat Bamrick Adopt-a-Teacher Program.

MaryPat Bamrick served LBUSD as an elementary school teacher for many years. She died from cancer in 2004, and the grant project is dedicated to her memory. Dozens of teachers have benefitted from the project over the years. Teacher recipients in the past have used the grants, typically \$250 or more, for field trips, classroom supplies, special projects, a sustainable garden and more.

The deadline to apply is Friday, Nov. 6.

### SCHOOL BULLETIN

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## • National Conference

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the Long Beach Education Foundation) and Jim Petri (LBUSD music curriculum leader) who were responsible for so much of the conference's success. They were both a lot of fun to work with, and they had taken care of every detail. But I know that these things don't come off well unless the district's leadership has supported the effort and ensured that everything met the highest standards. And this is where I am profoundly grateful to both of you. It was our best conference ever – and I thank you many times over."

## \$1.5M Federal Grant For Middle Schools

The U.S. Department of Education awarded the Long Beach Unified School District a \$1.5 million, three-year Skills for Success grant this week to help students develop traits and skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving as they explore colleges and potential careers, with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and math.

In partnership with the national nonprofit Jobs for the Future and SRI International, a leading research firm, the school district will develop, demonstrate and evaluate tools and strategies to enhance middle school students' "non-cognitive skills" with a college and career focused exploration class. Non-cognitive skills also include individual traits and skills such as persistence, creativity and self control.

Students will explore a variety of careers through project-based learning and visits to local colleges and businesses. Students also will record and reflect through creation of a career portfolio. The school district will develop measurement tools to gauge skill development and provide rubrics that teachers may use.

## New LBUSD Website

The Long Beach Unified School District launched a redesigned central website this week. The new site is more mobile-friendly while retaining popular features. Students, parents and employees looking for access to portals and other useful information will find such links under the Students, Parents and Employees tabs. The site retains the A-Z index and keyword search feature, and it adds compatibility with Google Translate for Spanish and Khmer audiences. Links to electronic newsletters, social media and other communications resources also are provided on the home page. The new website works best in modern versions of Internet browsers such as Firefox, Chrome, Safari or Internet Explorer. Visit the new site's home page at the same address as usual: [lbschools.net](http://lbschools.net).

## Bowling League

The Long Beach School Employees Bowling League will meet at 4 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 21 at Cal Bowl, 2400 Carson St., Lakewood. Contact Dan Ewaskey at 506-4622 for additional information.