

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY
IN SUPPORT OF MEASURE I
THE LHPUSD "SAFE LOCAL SCHOOLS" BOND

October 17, 2006

Dear Neighbor,

My name is Mark Graff. I am the president of our local school board. I am sending you this letter, in my own words and at my own expense, in order to share with you my thoughts on Measure I, the La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District "Safe Local Schools" Bond. I support it. I hope you will too.

This is a local measure, put on the ballot by your school board. If it passes, all of the money will be spent in our district, on repairs and renovations to our La Honda and Pescadero schools. School board members elected by our community will review and approve all the project plans. A committee of local citizens will oversee spending.

My four years on the school board (my term ends this November) coincided with one of the worst financial crises in the history of California's schools. It was a time when some districts in our state simply went bankrupt. Ours had its troubles too. But a new administration and a reform-minded school board cut costs, improved business practices and standardized accounting methods. The voters, for their part, passed a \$100 per parcel tax in 2005 to help with salaries and programs. The district is solvent--not rich, but fiscally healthy.

None of that, however, solves the problem of our aging and deteriorating school facilities. The parcel tax money, when the district begins to receive it next year, can't be used for repairs or renovation. For that, we need a school bond.

This past year, your school board has worked hard with parents, teachers, students, community leaders, architects and financial advisers to figure out what needs to be done and how we can do it. Now, with the passage of Measure I, we will be able to put adequate fire and earthquake protection in the schools; replace those "temporary" buildings in the middle school that were damaged in the '98 floods; fix leaky roofs and run-down bathrooms; and upgrade the postwar electrical system in the high school they don't make parts for any more.

We'll fix many more problems with that money. The County voter's pamphlet has details. But the truth is there is so much work to be done that the \$15,000,000 in bonds the district is asking for won't pay for it all. That's where the magic of matching funds comes in.

Living out in the country, as we all do, do you think that our little towns get their fair share of tax money from Sacramento and Washington? Of course we don't. Measure I is a way to get back our fair share of the taxes we pay every year, to enable the state to send us millions of dollars in matching funds—money that would otherwise go to other districts—for repairs to schools in La Honda and Pescadero.

A final note. I had to think long and hard before supporting this additional tax burden on my family. But knowing what I know, I just had no choice.

This is the right thing to do, and the right time to do it. The schools we have today were built in the 50's and 60's. After decades of hard use and bad weather, after years of scandalously inadequate state funding and the poor maintenance that results, our schools are just worn out.

As someone who has walked the grounds with superintendents and fire chiefs, architects and repairmen, I am telling you: these facilities need to be fixed *now*. Before children get sick or get hurt. Before the next big earthquake. Before some other disaster, or a lawsuit, forces us to do, at greater expense and without adequate planning, what we as a community should have been doing all along.

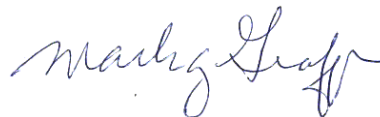
Further, the district today has got the policies, procedures, practices, and leadership to make sure the money is well spent. As a board member, I've attended every monthly meeting in the last four years. I've reviewed and approved every budget and every contract, advised and consented on every hire, and signed off on every painful cost-cutting measure and layoff. So I've seen the changes. I know where we were and where we've come to.

You know, I wouldn't have supported a parcel tax or a bond measure myself a few years ago. We needed to get the financial and management houses in order first. That's done. We passed a parcel tax for salaries and programs, a key to solvency in these times. *That's* done. A school bond is the next step. It will not only provide millions of dollars for repairs and renovation, but also a foundation for significant matching state funds, and (because it shows community commitment) an increase in philanthropic donations. I am confident we all want healthy public schools. This is the path to get there.

Of course, we taxpayers will need to consider carefully whom we put on the school board, give generously of our guidance, and do a good job on the bond oversight committee. But the new board is made up of good, strong people. Make sure they know what you're thinking and I believe they'll stay on track.

Somebody paid for the schools we attended. This November 7th, I believe it's our turn. Please join with me, if you can, in voting Yes on Measure I.

Sincerely,



Mark G. Graff

p.s. I am not speaking in this letter for the school district or anyone else. These are my personal opinions after four years of elected (and unpaid) service as a school district trustee.