It feels impossible to imagine La Jolla Elementary School without Principal Donna Tripi. Principals set the culture for a school, and our LJES culture has been defined by the amazing 19 years that Ms. Tripi has been at the helm.

Under her leadership, LJES has been designated a California Distinguished School three times, a recognition given to the top five percent of schools in the state. In 2016, LJES was named a California Gold Ribbon School, and a National Blue Ribbon School, a distinction given to 300 public schools a year in the nation.

As much as these honors are impressive to recount, Ms. Tripi has been so much more than simply a principal of an award-winning school. She is an integral thread in the fabric of our school. She is everywhere at once: directing traffic, handing out achievement awards, stopping by to watch each class performance, and thanking volunteers personally every day. Her voice leads every Friday pledge, MC’s every Halloween parade, and congratulates every song and dance at the Talent Show. She somehow perfectly balances authority with warmth, strength with kindness, and discipline with fun.

We cannot describe how much we will miss her words, her style and her leadership. The mark that she has left on our community of students and families who have marched through this campus for the past 19 years will be cherished forever. As sad as we are to say goodbye, we wish her all the best in her future endeavors and know that she will also do us proud as an LJES alum. We love you so much, Ms. Tripi.
Dear Parents,

One of the many traditions that I instituted twenty years ago at our school was reading to each class the first week of the school year to welcome our students back and to meet the new students in our classes. I chose different books for different grade levels, but my constant book for first grade is called, A Fine, Fine School, by Sharon Creech. It is about a principal who loves his school so much that he wants more and more school, so he has his students come to school on weekends, holidays, summer, etc. I would tell the students that the principal in the book and I have a lot in common. We both walk around school saying, “Aren't these fine, fine students? Aren't these fine, fine teachers? Isn't this a fine, fine school?” And in my case, I would also say, “Aren't these fine, fine parent volunteers?”

Yes, indeed we have a fine, fine school. I would venture to say that it is one of the finest schools in the state, if not the country. It has truly been an honor to lead a school of such excellence and so difficult to leave because of all of the dedicated teachers, staff, and parents I’ve worked with over the years who helped to make it that way.

When I came to our school, in August of 1999, La Jolla Elementary was a much different place than it is today. Our classrooms looked and felt very traditional. The curriculum and instruction was not meeting the needs of our very high achieving students. We had a computer lab that housed the only useful computers on site. There were no classroom libraries, and no designated library space at all. Our sole enrichment class was music once a week for ½ hour. Amigos Fiesta was our only PTO event. Our campus had been painted a drab gray, there was little green space, and resident families were reluctant to send their children to a place that was such an uninviting school environment.

Our first priority was, of course, instruction. The teachers and I worked on a balanced approach to literacy first. We studied reading strategies and added Readers’ Workshop, Writers’ Workshop, guided reading, and word study to our work. We increased the engagement of students in our lessons through asking them to talk more – in partnerships and now in collaborative conversations that bring them to a deeper understanding of concepts and texts together.

Next we worked on math. We studied exemplary math instruction and implemented math routines to help build number sense, a structured lesson to build concept understanding: introduction, guided practice, independent practice, and exit slips (quick end of lesson assessments to ensure that students understood the concept being taught in that lesson). We moved to an emphasis on problem solving and projects/scenarios in math that added a depth and complexity we didn’t have prior.

We were also in the first cohort to study and implement the new hands on science program. We built understanding through active experimentation and kept science notebooks to log our findings. Since, we’ve studied the Next Generation Science Standards and added new depth and complexity to that work. We’ve added simple machines and robotics to address engineering standards. In addition to our expert instruction, we now have a comprehensive educational program for our kids. Through the years, we’ve added art, technology, dance, theater, and Spanish to the enriching experiences we provide for our students.

Our PTO became more active and as people brought them ideas for social events on campus for our families, they were open to trying them on. We now have a Family Back to School Picnic, Family Dance, Family Movie Night, Family Science Night, and the Talent Show, in addition to Amigos Fiesta.

Our foundation had begun the Farmers’ Market the year before I came and it had begun to take hold as a community staple. It started with 15 vendors and is well over 120 at this point and brings in half of our fund raising dollars. We had our first gala in the spring of 2000 and made about $40,000 (successful for a first event). It has increased in the amount earned each year since. We also added the annual giving campaign and the Art and Wine Festival to our fund raising efforts.

Our campus is now a beautiful place for students to learn and grow. We’ve worked to make our street presence more welcoming, to paint the buildings to make the campus more attractive for our students and teachers, and to add green space for students to work outside.

I always say that creating our exemplary school was a labor of love. I love all of you and the relationships I’ve had over the years with amazing teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members. I’ve interacted with thousands of students over the years and worked alongside so many of you to accomplish amazing things for our children. It truly was a team effort and I will forever appreciate the part I played in your history.

While it is farewell, I hope that we will all stay connected forever. I will certainly visit from time to time to see how everyone is doing. I hope you won’t hesitate to email me at tripidonna@gmail.com to give me updates on your children. I will look forward to hearing about them.

Donna S. Tripi
Principal Tripi
Principal Tripi

Principal Tripi

Donna S. Tripi, Principal
Much to the delight of students, Halloween fell on a Wednesday this year, leaving more time for parties and trick-or-treating. Inflatables, Star Wars creatures, princesses, and superheroes filled the upper field for the LJES Halloween Parade. It is always a favorite tradition at LJES that brings students, families, and teachers together to celebrate as a community.

Día de los Muertos and Halloween have some common features, but students from Ms. Skommesa’s and Ms. Polen’s classes learned they are distinct holidays. What better way to continue the celebratory mood of Halloween then to dive straight into learning about a culturally significant Mexican holiday? The students not only studied about the holiday, but they created spectacular sugar skulls. With a few simple ingredients, a mold, parent volunteers, and lots of colorful decorations to choose from, the students created their masterpieces. This classroom activity is sure to create a lasting memory!

The LJES Family Dance held on Thursday, November 8 was a highlight to remember. Children and parents danced the night away to the live music of the Rey Vinole Swing Band, who played everything from Big Band to Jazz to the pop hits of today. Many enjoyed the line dances that took place during the band’s intermission. The refreshments provided the “punch” and “bites” to keep everyone’s energy up while the mood was set with special lighting and balloons. Thanks to Marianne Gary for coordinating such a wonderful evening!
THE IMPORTANCE OF HANDWRITING

I didn’t think I would ever be writing a newsletter article on the importance of handwriting! We, as educators, have been so consumed with helping students to express their ideas in writing that we have not emphasized handwrit -ing to the extent that we now understand is important. Additionally, because we now use technology so extensively in the writing process, students who do not have good handwriting skills don’t have an opportunity to attain them.

Some of the newer research on this topic links handwriting to success in both reading and higher-level writing skills. Handwriting supports reading in the younger grades because it is a multisensory activity. As children form letters, they reinforce their learning of sounds and spelling patterns.

The impact on higher-level writing skills is even clearer. If children are very labored in the physical aspect of writing, they are not focused on developing the craft of writing, e.g. developing their voice, organizing ideas, and elaborating on their ideas. Further, when writing is perceived as difficult and time consuming, students’ motivation to write is greatly reduced and they write minimal amounts.

Additionally, there is so much writing expected across disciplines that labored writing impacts performance in all areas of the curriculum. Two cases that come quickly to mind are written explanations in mathematics and science notebook entries. We definitely see students give less detailed responses if they are not proficient writers.

For all of the reasons above, we have renewed our emphasis on writing in grades K-3. If children practice proper letter formation, proper grasp, and proper posture while writing from an early age, their writing becomes less laborious. We know this will increase their motivation to write and positively impact their achievement in reading and other curricular areas. Students are engaged in ten to fifteen minutes of practice almost daily in manuscript writing at grades K-2 and cursive writing in grade 3.

The program we are using for both manuscript and cursive writing is Handwriting Without Tears. Emphasis in handwriting is on the following:

1. **Execution:** Students should have the correct pencil grasp - holding the pencil between thumb and pointer finger, resting on the middle finger. They should have correct posture when writing and hold the paper with one hand and write with the other.

2. **Formation:** Students should consistently form their letters every time they write. They should be formed top to bottom and use a continuous stroke without lifting the pencil for most letters.

3. **Legibility:** Legibility not only includes the readability of letters, but spacing within and between words.

4. **Speed:** Students should be able to write quickly and efficiently.

As always, we value your support of our efforts and give the following suggestions:

- Handwriting practice at home will reinforce our efforts at school only if you follow the same program as we are using at school and emphasize the same formation and pencil grasp.
- Give students motivational opportunities to write, e.g. a home journal, letters to grandparents, shopping lists.
- For students learning to read, have the student practice letter formation in the air and using his/her finger on a table before writing. As he/she is forming the letters, have him/her say the letter name and the sound for a more multisensory approach.

Please check with your teacher if you have a child in Kindergarten through third grade and have not received handwriting guidelines.

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The enchanting story of friendship came to life in this year’s theatre production of Charlotte’s Web. Under the directorship of Ms. Deirdre and her team, forty-seven second to fifth graders acted, sang, and danced to show us “we’ve got lots in common, where it really counts!” The audience marveled at the loyal friendship between Charlotte (Gaia Campos), Wilbur (Jacey Taylor, Presley Loyd), and Fern (Skye Hassankhani); laughed at the antics of Templeton (Clara Siddons) and her young rat pack; and cheered for Wilbur alongside a gaggle of lively farm animals. Bravo to all the actors who reminded us that friendships live forever and miracles do happen!

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**Principal Tripi**
Hi, my name is Joshua Rock and I’m excited to be your new student council president. I look forward to working with all the other new members of Student Council to put together many different service learning projects. One project I would like to do is a safety project so students can learn how to keep themselves safe. I also want our school to have fun while learning, therefore, I want to add a couple of spirit days. One of my main campaign promises was to listen to all of your suggestions. I want to encourage you to put your ideas into the suggestion box so that our council can read them and use them if possible. We will have a committee that will be assigned to take care of this task, so start thinking of great suggestions. It will be a big honor for me for my last year at La Jolla Elementary School to continue to make our school great!

This year’s Scholastic Book Fair was a huge success. Thank you to all the parents, children, and volunteers who stopped by and showed support. This year’s theme was An Enchanted Forest, and the students had a great time locating a hidden gnome in order to receive a prize. Some of our favorite comments this year included a kindergartener who was heard saying, “This is my favorite book fair ever!” and a fifth grader who commented, “Oh! I love this smell. It’s the smell of new books!”

Total book sales exceeded that of last year. All of the proceeds benefit the school library, and some books have been purchased already. Thank you to the Book Fair Committee (Karen Carlson, Julie Hom, Lindsay Smith, Megan Kim) and to Sonia Teder-Moore, who helped keep everything running smoothly in the library.

Led by Ms. Julie Greathouse, thirty-two students from the LJES 4th and 5th grade choir recently had the opportunity to sing for the annual “Songs of the Holidays” television broadcast at KUSI. They performed three songs, “Oy Hanukah”, “Irn KINDERlerin Kommet”, and “December in Our Town”. While the choir has always sounded fantastic, they have never looked this good! Thanks to Friends foundation, flowing deep blue dresses for the girls and matching paisley vests for the boys were purchased for LJES choir this year, and students were looking quite professional for their performance. The program will air on KUSI on December 24th at 8pm and December 25th at 10am.
Even small gifts open big doors for our children

A GIFT OF SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING

$25  A lap desk allowing for a flexible seating option.
$50  An Everyday Mathematics workbook for a student.
$100 One week of enrichment instruction for your child’s class.
$200  A year’s worth of art supplies for one classroom.
$250  Two early engineering/robotics kits used in the classroom.

Whether it is $25, $50, $500, or $1,000, your gift will make a difference.

A PUBLIC EDUCATION IS FREE. AN ENRICHED EDUCATION IS NOT.

Donate today. No donation is too small. 100% participation is our goal.
Questions? Please contact Molly Gutierrez at mollymcdowell@yahoo.com.
Everyone was getting in the holiday spirit at the Open Aire Market on Sunday, December 9th for the annual Winter Carnival. Many thanks to Ms. Julie Greathouse and the LJES choir for kicking off the festivities. It was wonderful to see all the families who joined us to craft and play. And special thanks to Santa for coming all the way from the North Pole for a visit!

We hope you make us part of your Sunday routine this holiday season. Whether you need unique gifts from our amazing local artisans, flowers or succulents for your holiday table, farm-fresh produce for a festive meal, or a delicious lunch in our food court, the market is the place to be. All market proceeds provide funding that supports and enriches the education of the children at LJES. The market is open every Sunday this holiday season from 9:00am to 1:30pm.
Interested in becoming one of our sponsors? Please contact Katy Siddons at katysiddons@gmail.com.

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