



LEN WOOD, STAFF

Sixth-graders at Hapgood Elementary School study a math lesson Tuesday afternoon. Their class won't be able to go to Catalina Island this year because of financial considerations. Sixth-graders at the Lompoc school will be able to go to the science camp next year because of a recent LUSD funding decision, which was among the primary topics at Monday night's State of the Schools address.

# 'State of Schools'

LUSD leaders highlight challenges, express optimism at public presentation

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Educational equity, charter schools and a potential new bond measure were among the major topics of examination Monday night during a Lompoc Unified School District "State of the Schools" address.

The 90-minute presentation, which included a 30-minute question-and-answer period with the audience, was sponsored by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and held at the Lompoc Public Library's Grossman Gallery. About two dozen people, most of them AAUW members, attended the event, which included presentations from LUSD Superintendent Trevor McDonald and Kathi Froemming, an assistant superintendent of education services.

The two administrators painted a mostly positive picture of the district and expressed optimism for its future. They both noted, however, that serious challenges are likely ahead.

Among those challenges is a re-

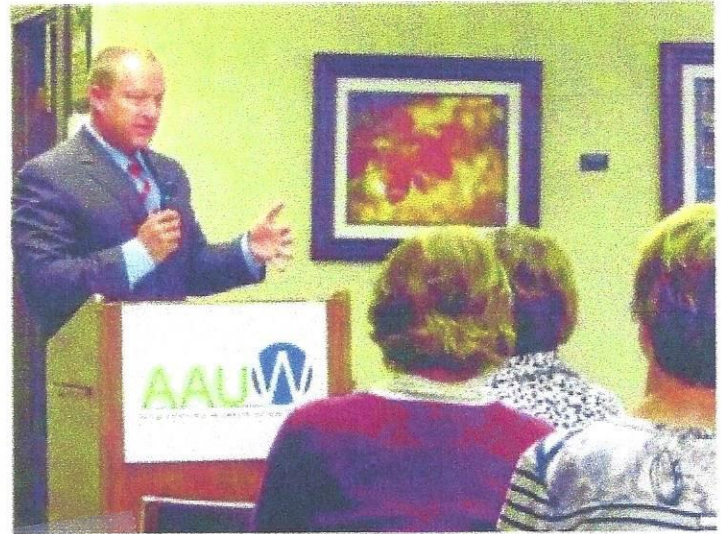
newed interest in charter schools, which are publicly-funded organizations that are independent of the school district in which they operate. There are debates all around the country over the necessity and/or effectiveness of charter schools and the impact that they have on the school districts that lose out on potential students — and the funding that goes along with them — to the charter schools.

"The fight for charters or against charters is going to become very contentious very shortly," Froemming said. "A couple of bills are going to the state Senate (that would) allow local education agencies to say no to charters if it detracts from their funding stream. Of course, charters are not happy with those laws, but public education ... is the foundation of our democratic system. Everybody's entitled to a free, public education."

Ensuring that every Lompoc student, no matter their background, is given strong educational opportunities is a primary focus for LUSD, the administrators said Monday.

A big part of that is the state's shift to Local Control Accountability Plans, which give districts more leeway in how they leverage funding.

One of the biggest examples of that plan's use in Lompoc is



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LUSD Superintendent Trevor McDonald speaks at a State of Schools address Monday night at the Lompoc Public Library. The event was sponsored by the American Association of University Women.

in the district's recent decision to spend \$300,000 to send every sixth-grader in the district on a field trip to the Catalina Island Marine Institute (CIMI).

LUSD students at certain schools were able to take the trips in the past, but it often depended on whether the schools or classes were able to raise enough funds on their own. This led to many students from lower economic backgrounds missing out on the trips, according to LUSD leaders, who expressed pride over the

ability to now send every student.

"We feel like (this is) one of the bigger-ticket items of the entire year that we've done, and it's going to have an impact on kids for a long, long time," said McDonald, who noted that the money had to be spent specifically on students and that the district is hopeful to continue the trips, which start in the 2017-18 school year, annually. "So we're really excited about that."

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Froemming said she's fielded a few calls from community members who expressed disappointment in the district spending so much money on the field trips. She drew applause Monday night for her spirited defense of the decision.

"As long as the state of California has (its) Local Control Funding Formula, where the neediest kids get more, we're going to ensure that our decisions are predicated on what's going to give them the best education, regardless of whether people like it or not — because it's

the right thing to do," she said, as members of the audience clapped and cheered.

Other funding-related issues also were explored in-depth at the gathering.

McDonald discussed the district's plans to seek another bond measure in 2018 that would be used to repair and upgrade many of the district's aging facilities. LUSD had a bond measure on the 2016 ballot, but it ultimately failed, despite getting 58.5-percent of votes in favor. That bond, due to the way in which LUSD board members voted to place it on the ballot, needed to get 67-percent approval for

success.

McDonald expressed dismay at the 2016 failure — particularly, he noted, since the district lost out on potential state matching funds that could have pushed the \$65 million bond to more than \$100 million in funding — but said the district will use the experience to better prepare for 2018.

The LUSD board voted 4-1, with board member Bill Heath dissenting, at its April 4 meeting to move forward with a \$15,000 feasibility study that will include a public survey intended to

gauge the community's feelings about another bond.

On Monday, McDonald laid out some of the challenges that could face a possible 2018 ballot measure, a list that included potential bonds from the city for a new fire station or other projects.

"It may be too much for folks to say yes again," McDonald said after passing out a packet listing the district's facility needs, which total \$90 million to \$100 million.

In other district forecasts, McDonald said LUSD leaders would like to bring in more arts teachers and to have a math coach at every school in an effort to offer a more well-rounded education.

Along those same lines, he said plans are in place to re-introduce a part-time physical education teacher at every LUSD elementary school beginning next school year. McDonald, a former football player, pointed out that Lompoc has the highest childhood-obesity rate in Santa Barbara County and said that a focus on physical education, which had been severely cut at the elementary level, and extracurricular sports could help fix that issue.

McDonald also pointed to the possible Huyck Sta-

dium renovation, for which the district has pledged \$1.2 million, as an example of the district working with other local agencies to not only address communitywide problems but, also, to improve school facilities.

Despite the challenges ahead, both McDonald and Froemming expressed enthusiasm about the direction the district is headed.

"(There are) just so many different ideas," Froemming said after listing some of LUSD's atypical campuses, like the La Honda STEAM Academy and the Los Berros Visual and Performing Arts Academy. "We don't believe one size fits all, but you know if there's an idea that is generated at a site and that teachers want to do, that's going to be a lot more significant and impactful than if the district is directing something.

She noted that there have been, and will be, some missteps, but that those are OK.

"There's not fear of failure in Lompoc right now," she said. "It's the time to make changes (and) try new things, and I'm hopeful."

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Kathi Froemming, an assistant superintendent of education services with LUSD, speaks at a State of Schools address Monday night at the Lompoc Public Library as LUSD Superintendent Trevor McDonald looks on. The event was sponsored by the American Association of University Women.