

# HTA Newsletter

September 2012

Hesperia Teachers' Association

**Have a question?  
Need some help?  
Contact an HTA E-  
board member!**

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**Facebook:** I Support  
Hesperia Teachers

**Website:**

[www.hesperiateachers.com](http://www.hesperiateachers.com)

**"Every truth has four corners: as a teacher  
I give you one corner, and it is for you to  
find the other three." –Confucius**

***Dates to Remember:***

***3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month is an opportunity for  
teachers in the high desert to gather and discuss  
topics at the Hesperia Marriot at 4:30pm.***

**October 20<sup>th</sup>:**

**Mud Jam 5K Mud Run @ Cedar Middle School**

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## **HTA Conferences-Fall**

In order to be considered for reimbursement for the one of the conferences please read the following information:

\*Please submit an email stating your name and which conference you'd like to be considered for to [Gabriel.ludi@hesperiausd.org](mailto:Gabriel.ludi@hesperiausd.org) by the listed date.

\*If more people submit emails than the allotted spaces allow there will be a random drawing to decide who will be chosen to attend. There are a predetermined number of spaces per conference depending on the cost of the conference.

\*Be advised that only **two** members per site per conference will be permitted for reimbursement.

\*Be advised that only **one** conference per member per year will be permitted for reimbursement.

\*Once you are chosen, you should register by the listed date (HTA will reimburse for the cost of listed). Following your attendance to the conference, submit your registration paper (with the conference name, date and registration price) to Jim Garrett at Oak Hills High School.

### Science

California Science Education Conference 2012

October 19-21, 2012

San Jose, CA

[http://www.cascience.org/csta/conf\\_registration.asp](http://www.cascience.org/csta/conf_registration.asp)

#### Fees:

##### CSTA Member Registration

Full conference                      \$125 (if registered by October 1<sup>st</sup>)

Weekend only                         \$105 (if registered by October 1<sup>st</sup>)

##### Nonmember Registration

Full conference                      \$164 (if registered by October 1<sup>st</sup>)

Weekend only                         \$140 (if registered by October 1<sup>st</sup>)

**Email [gabriel.ludi@hesperiausd.org](mailto:gabriel.ludi@hesperiausd.org) by Thursday, September 20<sup>th</sup> and you will be notified by Friday, September 21<sup>st</sup>.**

### Math

CMC South Conference 2012

November 2-3, 2012

Palm Springs, CA

[http://cmc-math.org/activities/south\\_reg.html](http://cmc-math.org/activities/south_reg.html)

#### Fees:

\$140 (full conference) or \$100 (Saturday only) on or before October

1, 2012

Email [gabriel.ludi@hesperiausd.org](mailto:gabriel.ludi@hesperiausd.org) by Thursday, September 20<sup>th</sup> and you will be notified by Friday, September 21<sup>st</sup>.

## **2012 Mud Jam 5K Mud Run**

**Cedar Middle School - Athletic Field**

**Saturday, October 20, 2012 @ 8:00 AM**

### **Brief Description**

Mud, Mud and more MUD! TWO obstacle courses and 2 street runs make MudJam unique and super challenging! MudJam is dedicated to providing much needed funds to our schools' instrumental music programs. This event is Rain or Shine!

**For more information and to register for the race go to:**

**<http://www.MudJam.org>**

### **Article Highlight:**

## **Keeping parents in the loop**

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin

[Volume 17 Issue 1 of California Educator](#)

Michelle Wright was very surprised when her AP U.S. history teacher telephoned her parents at the beginning of the school year just to say hello. She was shocked when he called them a few months later to say she wasn't doing her best.

"He told them that I was slacking off and needed to work harder," says the high school junior. "So I did. My grade went from a B minus to a B plus. I was surprised when he called, but I think it shows how much he cares."

Richard Neffson, her teacher at Rancho Cotate High School, believes parent-teacher communication helps students succeed at any age, though it may be more important with teens.

"I call parents early in the year to introduce myself, and parents appreciate that," says Neffson, Rohnert Park Cotati Educators Association. "The first contact is always positive. Then I build on that to keep parents updated, whether it's good or bad. Most express appreciation when I let them know how their son or daughter is doing. I send out letters, e-mails, and copies of actual assignments that are due. I also have parent conferences when necessary."

When teachers and parents work together, students earn better grades and are less likely to drop out, reports the National Education Association. Good communication between home and school is essential to helping students succeed, say researchers from Iowa State University, yet strategies for establishing communication are overlooked in teacher training. Perhaps it should be emphasized, since 20 percent of new teachers identify parent relationships as causing “significant stress,” according to a MetLife survey.

### **Good communication from the beginning**

“Parents are the first teachers for children, so it’s important for teachers to have a positive relationship with them,” says Thomas Prather, a fourth-grade teacher at Grant Elementary School in Richmond. “The only link between home and school is the parent. Without that, you’ve got two worlds unconnected with each other.”

Nothing is worse than angry parents, and many CTA members are determined to start the new school year on the right foot by improving their communication skills. Parents surveyed said they prefer Internet communication such as e-mail, an online parent portal, or e-newsletters. However, this may not work in low socioeconomic areas where families lack Internet access.

Prather tells parents how important they are at a Back to School Night and explains exactly what his expectations are for students when it comes to class work, homework and behavior. He also calls parents during the first week of school — usually before problems arise — to set a positive tone.

“I tell them their child had a good day. They may be used to teachers calling them to say their child had a bad day. It’s a good way to start the school year. It builds trust and camaraderie between parent and teacher. And it makes it easier when I call next time, if there are problems.”

Parents are encouraged to discuss their concerns with him before or after school. Those who check in regularly have students who perform better and sometimes offer to volunteer in the classroom, says the United Teachers of Richmond member.

Teachers may have the best intentions, but the wrong tone can set parents on edge, adds Prather. Instead of saying, for example, that Johnny is misbehaving, it might work better to ask a parent, “What can we do, working together, to get Johnny back on track?”

### **Connecting with parents of tweens and teens**

There is typically a communication drop-off in secondary school, say teachers. Parents may feel the child is “too old” for them to stay in touch with a teacher, they are “too busy,” or it’s not as important.

Nothing could be further from the truth, says Anita Williams, a sixth-grade math, science and AVID teacher at Painted Hills Middle School in

## Desert Hot Springs.

“I am the mother of twin middle school girls and a ninth-grader, so I know it’s important for teachers and parents to stay connected in middle school. Kids are going through hormonal changes, identity changes and looking for a best friend. So teachers and parents need to talk.”

At Back to School Night she tells parents she is their “eyes and ears” and that if something is off-kilter, she will inform them immediately. She explains that as a parent, she understands their concerns firsthand. The Palm Springs Teachers Association member has an “open-door policy” where parents are welcome to observe at any time — as long as they are not disruptive.

“Every week, parents get a progress report, and students need to get it signed and back to me, because it counts as a homework grade,” she says.

Williams sends newsletters to parents. Some don’t speak English, so she uses online translation programs or asks students to translate. Her district has an automated phone system that allows her to individualize messages, such as “Your child was misbehaving today” or “Your child made a good choice.” But when she has time, a personal call works best.

“When I call to address an upset parent, I introduce myself in a bubbly voice,” says Williams. “It’s hard to be upset with a person who is cheery. I say I am calling to address their concerns because, unfortunately, there has been miscommunication or a misunderstanding.”

Parents such as Millie Mendez appreciate her efforts.

“Ms. Williams is very connected to us, and that’s important,” says Mendez. “Whenever I have a question she will send an e-mail back right away. She lets me know if Rebecca is falling behind, which is great, because I’m working two jobs.”

Math teacher Jacqueline Da Volio worried that she might receive lots of angry e-mails when she decided to post student grades online at Rosemont Middle School, but found instead that parents were thrilled to have instant information at their fingertips.

“Now they are completely in the loop,” says the Glendale Teachers Association member. “I used to get lots of e-mails asking ‘How is my child doing?’ but those have dramatically decreased now that they have access to information 24 hours a day.”

She has a master list of parent e-mail addresses and sends “alerts” about test dates, assignments and events. She also sends home postcards filled with “good news” about students.

“One student told me, ‘I can’t hide anything from my mom.’ Everything’s out in the open,” she laughs. “Let’s face it, middle school kids rarely share what’s going on in the classroom. As a parent, I totally get that.”

## **Students can facilitate parent-teacher dialogue**

Having students take charge during parent-teacher conferences makes it easier to communicate with parents, says Sandi Mangan, an environmental technology teacher at La Quinta Middle School in Desert Hot Springs.

“We have student-led conferences where students talk to their parents. The teacher is a facilitator, and the parent can’t talk until the student is done. The student will tell their parent what they need to do better, study skills they should be using, and things their parents can do to help them to be more successful at school.”

Parents, she says, are seldom on the defensive when students take responsibility for their own learning. Sometimes parents discover they can make positive changes by doing little things, such as giving their children a quiet place to study or having them spend less time baby-sitting their siblings.

“It improves communication between parent and teacher — and also between parent and child,” says the Desert Sands Teachers Association member. “It opens up the conversation, and sometimes at a later time, parents want to continue the conversation. Parents realize the student needs their help, the teacher needs their help, and that teachers aren’t the big bad wolf they thought we were. It’s a win-win situation for everyone.”

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## **CTA Connection:**

# **Free webinars being offered on the CA Common Core State Standards**

September 2012

Transitioning to the CA Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects will be made easier with a series of free online courses being offered beginning Oct. 3.

For more information go to:

<http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smu/view/e/5287>

***If you have a special event, teaching story,  
announcement, or anything exciting  
happening at your site that you would like to  
share, please send it to  
[hta.comschair@gmail.com](mailto:hta.comschair@gmail.com).***