



the PACIFIC PRIMARY SUN

FALL 2001

*This Newsletter is Dedicated to the memory of
Rose Michaud – Former Afternoon Supervisor &
Kevin Stark – Former Teacher*



A SAFE & NURTURING PLACE *By Jim Greenberg*

Thank goodness. As I approached the front door of the school on September 11, I let out a big sigh of relief. I read the sign on the door asking everyone not to discuss current events on school grounds and I was reassured. I knew that my daughter Emma's days at Pacific Primary would continue feeling safe and nurturing — her "normal" routine could continue despite the fact that our world had completely changed.

Although Belann and the rest of the staff had faced crisis before, this type of tragedy was uncharted territory. Big issues needed attention quickly: whether the school should remain open, how to address the staff's feelings and concerns, and how to reassure and support families. Decisions were made with an overriding attention to what the children needed to keep them feeling safe.

During the rest of the week, and in the following weeks the Pacific Primary staff did a remarkable job assessing children's reactions to the events on the East Coast; reassuring children that they were safe and helping children express their thoughts and feelings about the tragedy. Elyse was a vital part of these efforts. On the first day, Elyse saw children making very literal drawings of the World Trade Center disaster. She used these drawings as an opening to help them talk about their feelings. She made a concerted effort to reassure children that they were safe.

At the end of the day on September 11, Belann, wrote and distributed a special edition of *Sunspots* which briefed parents on what the school planned to do to "create a safe and nurturing place" for the children

and to encourage parents to personally and appropriately inform their children about the events and not expose them to a barrage of media images. Later that night, Belann realized that the next day was going to be very challenging, as children returned to school having possibly had more exposure to the tragedy. She knew she needed a plan for staff to handle children's needs. As a result, she wrote a memo to staff about how to handle children's questions and how to work with children's expressions of fear, anger or other emotions generated by the tragedy. This staff memo and a request to parents to inform teachers about what their children knew, proved to be very helpful in planning activities for the rest of the week.

In the Coyote classroom, Circle Time on the following day began by Chad telling the children that one of their classmates felt sad that buildings had caught fire in New York and Washington. After reassuring the children of their safety, the teachers passed a talking stone around the class to give each child an opportunity to share something about the news and how it made them feel. Chad noticed that most of the children said they were "sad," but it surprised him that a few children were angry. As one child was given the opportunity to talk about his anger, he piled some crates together and said, "if I had one of these crates, I would have climbed on it and grabbed one of those airplanes so it didn't crash into the buildings."

After sharing their feelings in the circle, Coyotes passed around a stuffy named "The Feelings Friend," which everyone held and

(continued on page 6)

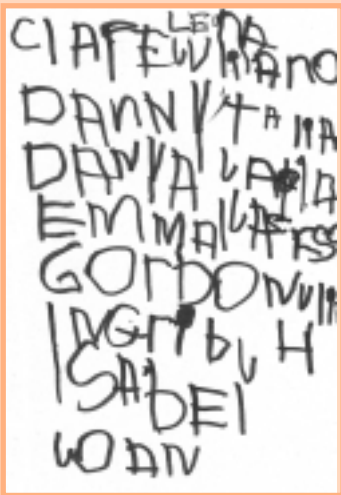
SAVE THE DATE!
AUCTION 2002
SATURDAY, MARCH 2

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EMERGENT CURRICULUM: HONORING CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

By Laura Galvin



In September 2000, none of us knew that Pacific Primary children would bake dog biscuits, make fragrant flower collages, build spacecraft and dissect owl pellets by the end of the school year. These activities happened because of the school's belief in the value of emergent curriculum as part of the preschool educational experience. Speaking about emergent curriculum, Gray Whale teacher John Hogan said, "teachers plan specific activities after children's interests are known, rather than before. We are teaching children how to learn, to love education, rather than to provide them with specific facts." Carefully observing children and following their interests helps to make this happen. Here is a class-by-class glimpse of emergent curriculum in practice.



We are teaching children how to learn to love education, rather than to provide them with specific facts.

Sandpipers

The Sandpiper Train Project ran at high speed for an entire month. The children's passion for trains led to a ride on a real Muni train, an outpouring of artwork and stories about trains by the children, "train experts" visiting the classroom and more. The Sandpipers actually became a train - each wore a self-painted "box" car suspended from the shoulders. Linked together, they chugged through the neighborhood and around a track painted on the schoolyard cement, while the video cameras rolled.

Many Sandpipers loved to pretend to be dogs, and this inspired the Dog Days Project. Highlights included a trip to the San Francisco Pet Hospital, where the children watched a veterinarian remove a foxtail from a dog's hindquarters. After this, many patients (stuffed animals) in the ongoing

Sandpiper pet hospital also suffered from sore bottoms. Victoria from the SPCA, and her dog Fergus, helped prepare children for a walk in Golden Gate Park where they safely became acquainted with six new dog friends.

Gray Whales

As the Gray Whales asked their teachers to read the story of *Ferdinand The Bull* over and over again, each page suggested new possibilities for the children to explore. This beloved book inspired activities that became such a special part of their curriculum during the year. Peace was a very big theme as the children focused on Ferdinand's distaste for fighting. The children illustrated phrases from the book and also used the Ferdinand character in original stories, bringing the idea of peace to other situations. The location of the story invited attention to Spain. The children prepared a Spanish food extravaganza — including "sangria", chorizo sausage and Spanish olives and enjoyed their tapas as Spanish music played in the background. Later, flamenco dancers visited the school. Bees, honey and flowers featured in the book also led to particular activities.

Rainbow Dolphins

A book called *Why Do Balloons Fly?* gave flight to many imaginative questions among the Rainbow Dolphins. What if a balloon went into outer space? How do space ships fly? A book about planets then stimulated many more questions and, by popular demand, the Space Project was launched. The children transformed two refrigerator boxes into painted spacecraft complete with control panels and sheathed with aluminum foil for an authentic metal exterior. The classroom became outer space, with stars everywhere. Space was often on the minds of the children. While using a juicer to make carrot juice, one child noticed how the thick orange liquid going into the bowl created a depression with ripples around it. She shouted, "It looks just like Jupiter!" and then ran to get the picture that proved her point.

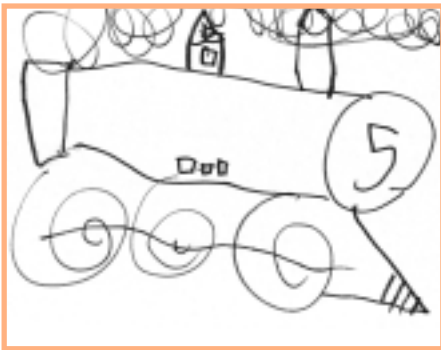
After Lunar New Year, many Rainbow Dolphins could not stop wondering and talking about dragons. As days turned into weeks, a group of children used layers and layers of papier-mache over a three-dimen

Emergent Curriculum...

sional skeleton to create a standing dragon. This fantastic dragon reflected in form, feature, color and decoration the children's own ideas, worked out in extensive discussion during the entire duration of the project.

Coyotes

The coincidence of a teacher holding a copy of Audubon North American Birds and the discovery of a dead Mourning Dove in the schoolyard sparked the Coyotes interest in birds. The children made a list of birds they had seen or hoped to see. As they spotted the birds, the children checked them off the list. Individually and with friends, the Coyotes created their own bird books. This provided a very good reason to practice writing real



words. The children also made detailed drawings, and portrayed birds in dramatic play. They frequently consulted the many books about birds in the classroom library. Indeed, many parents were surprised by how much their children learned about birds.

And so, what shape will emergent curriculum take in this 2001-2002 school year? Teachers, children and parents can expect the unexpected!



MEMORIALS:

All of us at Pacific Primary are deeply saddened by the loss of **Rose Michaud**, former Afternoon Supervisor, who recently passed away at the age of 71.

Rose's 13 years at Pacific Primary were filled with fun and love. The children cherished the special time they shared with Rose, curled up in her lap while she read them books in the Sunroom and showered them with affection. We brightly recall her "heart of gold" and her great sense of humor. Rose was respected for her frankness and honesty. She was well-loved by all.

At her retirement party two years ago, Rose sat regally on a throne, wearing a crown of pink roses. The children presented her with flowers as a token of their love and appreciation.

Rose Michaud will be missed and remembered fondly. At her families request, donations in her memory may be made to any AIDS organization.

-Jila Hooshnam

We are sad to share the news that **Kevin Stark**, a teacher at Pacific Primary for five years, from 1988-1993 died in September.

After leaving Pacific Primary, Kevin went on to finish college and joined the Peace Corp in Madacasar for two years. He then received his Masters in Public Health from University of Alabama and worked for the CDC in Chicago.

Previous Director, Charlotte Burchard remembers, "Kevin was loved and appreciated by all the Pacific Primary family who knew him. He worked in all the classes. Because of Kevin's enthusiasm, responsibility and concern for the children's safety, he was in charge of the Summer Field Trip program."

Kevin's original mind, wonderful wit and great spirit will be missed by the many people who knew and loved him.

-Brian Silvera & Nancy Anderman



VOLUNTEERISM: THE BLOCK PROJECT

By Stephania Serena & Chad Thomas



Pacific Primary and volunteerism are synonymous. Opportunities beckon in so many aspects of running and enhancing the school, like collecting plants from a garden center to beautify the school, troubleshooting the sometimes unreliable computer system, helping in the classroom during a staff meeting or working on the annual auction. Our children certainly benefit from our volunteer efforts, but what we grownups most gain is a growing sense of community. This was my experience when we set out to build large blocks for the children to work with in the yard.

When I arrived last fall as a new parent of a Coyote, I brought with me a passion for early childhood education. I had taught at City & Country School in Greenwich Village, where my son went to school when we lived in New York City. I became enamored with large blocks as a simple, open-ended material for children to create their own environments with. After I did a presentation on the topic to the staff here at Pacific Primary, Chad and Belann encouraged development of such large



blocks. This is when I started to feel the magic of volunteering at Pacific Primary, doing something that would enrich the children and feeling a connection with the school and the people who joined in the effort. And an effort it was.

I must admit how intimidated I was first ordering the lumber and then facing a pile of it in the schoolyard, all destined to be various sized hollow blocks. I needed help in this very skill and tool intensive project. So I posted signs around the school: "Help needed to build large blocks. We need a chop saw, nail

gun, belt sanders and a wet/dry shop vac." Lo and behold, the volunteers came forward and so did the equipment! Not only did parents and staff volunteer. I recruited our talented neighbor up the street -- he has great tools and knows how to build anything. My father generously arrived from Southern California to bring his expert building knowledge, too. I also pestered a very gracious Sally Cartwright, author of *The Block Book*, for tips and advice via email from her home in Maine.

We were a motley crew (well, some of us) that sunny weekend last August, surrounded by lumber and power tools. We all found jobs to match our skills and discovered people to match our temperaments. During those two days, we all made personal sacrifices in order to contribute. But we gained the satisfaction of together creating something that will stimulate and engage thousands of children through the generations, while forming connections with each other and with Pacific Primary.

-S. Serena

I was one of the volunteers who helped make the big blocks. I have always provided for block play in the classroom, but to actually make blocks (to be able to make toys!) added a whole new dimension to being a teacher of young children. After the work was over, I noticed that what I and the other volunteers experienced had many interesting parallels with children's work with blocks.

During that day, I had a sense that I was doing real work — the kind of work you can see, feel, hear, and smell. I was working with real tools and lumber, something I hardly ever do in my day-to-day life. I saw other volunteers lovingly check the wood's smoothness as they worked on sanding, make sure they cut the lumber just right for a precise angle, and start work over if mistakes were made. It was the kind of immersion in work that children experience when they play.

As we worked, I had the feeling that we were affecting the world in a very concrete way. This is what children feel when they build with blocks, especially when they are able to make a structure which is bigger than they are, or make their own stores, boats, spaceships and houses. You could sense it in the busy hum of the day: to step back and watch



Volunteerism...

the group working, we looked like a bunch of elves in a fairy tale, rushing to get some mysterious work done overnight before the protagonist returns.

The deep engagement and purpose could be seen by volunteers working alone and in groups. Three or four people would often stand next to each other for 30 minutes at a



stretch without talking to one another, too engrossed in their work. At the same time, some volunteers never stopped talking, even with the fierce competition of loud belt sanders. Undoubtedly, we have all seen exactly these different play styles in the classrooms of Pacific Primary, too.

Finally, just as children are overjoyed at creating intricate block structures together – at having truly done the work themselves – we volunteers enjoyed a palpable sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. It felt great to volunteer. We are all, from youngest to oldest, proud of good work and working towards a common goal.

-C. Thomas



CLASS REUNIONS

by Rick Lewis

I remember when we were looking at preschools for Kelly, we were reminded by friends that some of the friendships she would make during this time would last forever. Four years later, Kelly's list of friends that she wanted to invite for a day at the beach included an equal number from her Pacific Primary days as from her kindergarten class at Presidio Hill.

I recall also when we started the interview process for grade schools for Kelly. Throughout her endless hours of support and coaching, Belann stressed: Is the school a good fit for Kelly? Is it a good fit for our family? At the time, the process seemed harrowing. But the support from Belann and the other parents going through the same school search made it manageable - we were all in the same boat. We found the school that seemed to be the best fit for Kelly and for our family and that September, bid farewell to our Pacific Primary family. But during this bittersweet time, we knew we would not lose touch with the families at Pacific Primary who we had grown to know and love.

One day last spring, I got a call from another Pacific Primary alum, Tricia. She is Nathaniel's mom, and we had been room parents together for Nathaniel and Kelly's Coyote

class. She mentioned that her son had been talking about his Pacific Primary friends, and admitted that she and her husband missed the other parents as well. She wondered about having a Coyote Class of 2000 reunion. What a great idea it was, and what a great reunion we had. So many families were there, reminiscing about our Pacific Primary days and talking excitedly about how the first several months of kindergarten were going. We were also delighted that the Coyote teachers could join us as well. The children all looked so much more mature to us, as did their little brothers and sisters, who were part of "the class" as well. But the kids picked right up where they had left off almost a year before. Some of these would be life-long friendships.

As for this year, the second Annual Coyote Class of 2000 reunion is in the works!

Rick is Kelly's papa. Kelly's family also includes Bob (dad), Rita (mom), Kate and Johnny (sister and brother - Coyote Class of 1993).

If you would like to plan a reunion for your class or reconnect with Pacific Primary friends from days gone by, please give **Belann** a call at (415) 346-0906 or email her at Belann@pacprim.org and we'll help you get in touch with old friends.

Thank You to Providian Financial

for the \$15,000 grant for our Expressive Arts Program, directed by Elyse Jacobs.

Special Thanks to
Loren Brown at Providian.



*Peace is the world smiling
Peace is a gentle dove
Peace is caring
Peace is sharing
Peace is filling the
world with love.*



A Safe & Nurturing Place, *continued...*

hugged. After singing the song, “Love Is Something If You Give It Away,” the Coyotes spontaneously began blowing kisses to the stuffy. Since that Circle Time, “The Feelings Friend” has had a permanent home in the Coyote classroom. If a child or adult is feeling worried or sad, he or she can give it a hug or carry it around.

It wasn’t until the end of the week that the Rainbow Dolphin class held their own Circle Time to address children’s feelings. As it turned out, many children knew about what had happened and needed to talk about the events and their feelings. One child remarked, “the airplane crashed a building. It made a fire and people died. And the airplane was big and there was a lot of smoke. And there was people helping them. The houses all falling down like boom, boom, boom from the smoke. I was really sad.” Again, the Rainbow Dolphin teachers reassured the children they were safe and helped them vocalize their feelings. After their discussion, the class passed a hug around the circle. Although the Sandpipers and Gray Whale children didn’t need circle times, teachers in both classrooms monitored how much children knew and if they needed to express themselves through their artwork and play. There were a couple children in both classes who knew more than others about what had happened and needed to release their feelings.

In addition to both circle times, the staff gave children the room and resources to share their feelings in a variety of ways. Elyse observed many children creating images of airplanes, fire, people digging with rescue dogs and wrapping animals to protect them from fire. One child showed Elyse a drawing and remarked, “this is the World Trade Center and smoke around it so people can’t see it. This is an airplane and the bad guys. But down here, this is a new train and the people are all fine and are moving on.”

Staff also encouraged children to express themselves through their play. A group of Coyotes played a daily game of “doctor” for an entire week. After staff put out boxes of connecting toys, children began building a chain going through the entire school including into Belann’s office and out through the back door to the playground. As the chain kept breaking, children would rush to put it back together. Chad noticed that the children “had a sense that they were creating things

bigger than themselves, as though they had a sense of effecting the world. It was a real sense of group work; building and repairing together.” In the midst of the chain activity, one child took advantage of expressing himself on some big easel paper by drawing a winding picture of the chain. He finished by scribbling all over it with red pen and said, “this is the chain, red is red hot, fire and lava.”

Afternoon play in the yard appeared to also be an important outlet for children. As Afternoon Coordinator, Yusef noticed that games had new twists and intensity. He and I both witnessed a group of children playing an imaginary game dealing with death a couple of days after the tragedy. As I walked into the yard to pick up my daughter that day, she came running up to me exclaiming that one of her classmates was dead and she and her friends were protecting her. I looked over and saw her classmate lying very still on the cement with her eyes closed. My daughter and other children had placed milk crates all around her and were now in the process of laying various objects over the crates and across her body. My daughter said that the hula-hoops on the girl’s stomach were to protect her tummy. One child looked at me and explained, “we’re protecting her heart.”

In a special staff meeting, Belann recommended, “living in the moment and being present” is what we need to remember to do with the children. She also gave the staff a chance to share their feelings about the week’s events. In the second week, Belann scheduled an evening discussion for parents with Dr. Zoe Grusky, Pacific Primary’s Mental Health Consultant. The evening was useful in giving parents support for dealing with their own and their children’s responses to the attacks.

I was drawn to Pacific Primary because of its focus on children’s creative and emotional growth and its efforts to build community. The importance of those underlying principles has been reaffirmed many times since the tragedy. In that spirit, it was fitting to end the week of September 11 by having the entire school and many of the parents participate in the Friday Folkdance tradition with Heidi. Those attending found it was a needed respite and an opportunity to feel close to other families. That day gave the ending song about peace a new sense of urgency (see left column for lyrics).

AGE DIVERSITY - ENRICHES OUR STAFF *By John Hogan*

Just three years. That is the age difference between the youngest Sandpiper and the oldest Coyote. I think that I have had the same roll of film in my camera for as long. Still, both parents and early childhood professionals know that children go through several distinct and important developmental stages in those years. Age diversity at Pacific Primary only begins there. The difference between our youngest and the oldest staff member is eighteen times greater. With an age span of 52 years, a combined total of 364 years of teaching experience and an average of 17 years in the field, our staff includes people at every stage of adult life, each contributing something unique to the school.

Our youngest teachers, those just out of college, energize the school with their vitality. For them, every experience is new and the classroom is full of possibilities; they welcome a chance to prove themselves. It is easy to understand why they often create especially close bonds with their first students. Their fresh perspectives on the common dynamics of early childhood education make a valuable contribution to the school. We all benefit from their enthusiasm.

With a few years of teaching under their belt, some on our staff are at the stage when they become confident, skilled educators who have defined their own teaching style. Although still young, they have already outlasted many of their peers; studies confirm what these teachers know, that nationally only 35% of those they entered the profession with are still teaching after five years. Those who remain have experienced the same frustrations as the others but have also discovered the joy of teaching. They bring both that joy and their proud professionalism with them to school every day. We all benefit from their commitment.

The next, slightly older group of teachers at Pacific Primary is the largest. These are the teachers who have been in the field for ten to twenty years. They have a time-tested repertory to draw from and rely less on instinct than on experience. They have developed a personal educational philosophy and a definition of age appropriate behavior and expectations that inform all of their interactions with children. Moreover, time has given them an accurate understanding



of the qualities and skills that make them role models for other staff members. We all benefit from their expertise.

Pacific Primary is in the unique and enviable position of having several teachers whose tenure spans two generations of students. In fact, these treasured few have both seen the children of their first students graduate from our program and have taught with teachers whom they taught as children some twenty years earlier. These matriarchs, for in this case they are all women, are the keepers of our school's oral history. Their names have become synonymous with Pacific Primary and it is impossible to overestimate their contribution to the lives of so many children. We all benefit from their wisdom.

Fifty-two years. That is the age difference between our youngest and oldest staff member. In the same way that the differences in our beliefs, race, sex and sexual orientation mirror the multi-cultural community outside our door, the difference in our ages mirror the multi-generational families we have all come from. And we all benefit from that.



One recent graduate, Annie Robinson, was overhead having the following conversation:

Annie said, "I'm going to kindergarten in the fall.

I'm a little nervous."

"Why is that?" asked a grown-up.

"The teachers of course," Annie replied, "everybody knows the best teachers are at pre-school."

ROOM PARENTS
Sandpipers
 Gayle Okumura Sullivan
 Greta Kim
Gray Whales
 Nora Chun-Uba
 Sandra Coke
Rainbow Dolphins
 Charlie Spiegel
 Molly Dwyer
Coyotes
 Courtney den Broeder
 Leah Karliner

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Contributors
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 Nancy Anderman
 Laura Galvin
 Belann Giarretto
 Jim Greenberg
 John Hogan
 Jila Hooshnam
 Rick Lewis
 Anne Regenstein
 Stephania Serena
 Brian Silvera
 Chad Thomas

Photography
 Belann Giarretto
 Stephania Serena

Design
 Stephania Serena

ALUMNI NOTES:

We're always happy to hear news about Pacific Primary's alumni. Here are some recent updates:

Kelly Fahrner-Scott loved kindergarten at Presidio Hill School and is now in the first grade.

Lucio Hupfer is happily attending first grade at Clarendon, still sees old friends like Etain Hiller and Amanda Owen-Walkup, and recently welcomed baby sister (and future Sandpiper?) Rorie.

Ashley Wilson enjoyed her first-grade year. She especially likes learning to read, playing soccer with her friends, and learning new swimming strokes. Her latest favorite activity is learning to play piano and learning about the lives of composers.

Kailin Koch is in second grade at Presidio Hill School and loves it! She still loves art and talks about Elyse and her pre-school teachers.

Also in second grade at Presidio Hill School, **Daniel Gorham** is excelling at reading and math, has great curiosity, and is enthusiastic about sports, especially basketball. He's got good friends and, most of all, he seems happy and secure with himself. [Ed. note: What more could we wish for our children?!]

Gabriel Edlin is now a third grader at the Japanese Bilingual-Bicultural Program at Clarendon Alternative School, and is flourishing in ways that clearly show the momentum of a start at Pacific Primary. He still gets together with old friends from P.P., and plays team sports with some of them.

Cal Brown is doing well in the third grade at San Francisco Day School. He loves to read, plays all sports, and is having a great time.

Kayla Harris is in third grade at George Payne Elementary School, and is very involved in her school plays, including Aladdin. Her parents added a note of gratitude, "Thank you for loving, nurturing and

supporting our daughter. This family will always be grateful."

Joren Dawson is happy in fourth grade at San Francisco Day School. He plays soccer and studies at SF School of Circus Arts. David and family are all on a 6-month sabbatical in Spain and send their love to friends at P.P.

Andreas Dussuyer-Bremond is another happy fourth-grader, attending FAIS. He still sees his Pacific Primary classmates **Justine Plaut-Corbie**, **Marissa Endicott**, and **Emma Sena-Abbinanti**.

Jonny Robertson is now in sixth grade at the Town School for Boys. He plays basketball, loves his laptop computer (required for school), and is constantly on the phone with his friends. **Katie Robertson** is a freshman at Georgetown University, and ran the Homeless Sandwich Program in San Francisco on Saturday mornings for her high school.

Ceci Brown is a sixth-grader at Convent of the Sacred Heart, and loves playing basketball and volleyball. She's also into ballet and her razor scooter.

Ali Whitehurst completed her freshman year at International High School and her mother, Barbara Weir, sent along a quote from Ali's 8th grade autobiography project: "The staff encouraged all the students to reach for the stars. At Pacific Primary, you feel as if you have another family. They were and always will be a part of my family!"

Kimberly Sargent graduated from Yale University in 2000, and returned to New Haven this Fall to work in Yale's Investment Office. Her brother **Jonathan Sargent** has finished his first year at Columbia.

David O'Donnell got married in April, has bought a house in Chicago and is still involved in puppet theatre. His wife works at Steppewolf Theatre. In other family news, **Tobin O'Donnell** recently finished his Masters in Creative Writing at Syracuse University and is teaching there this year.

And Ron Lezell wrote to say, simply, "I still see Pacific Primary's influence daily in **Elijah Jatovsky**. Thank you."

Money Matters: New Support for Students & Programs *by Bruce Deming*

Pacific Primary received several grants during the past year, successfully filled the gap between tuition revenue and operating expenses, and concluded its \$500,000 Scholarship Endowment Challenge more than a year in advance, making 2000/2001 a tremendously successful fundraising year for our school.

Pacific Primary received three grants during the past year. A \$3,000 grant from the Mimi & Peter Haas Fund was used to build a new loft in the Gray Whale room. A second \$3,000 grant from McKesson Corporation enabled us to retain the services of Dr. Zoe Grusky, a Pre-School Mental Health Consultant who visits Pacific Primary twice a month to work with staff and parents. Finally, a generous \$15,000 grant from Providian Financial supports the Expressive Arts program directed by Elyse

Jacobs. In the coming year, Pacific Primary intends to increase its efforts to obtain grants and to build on the successes of the past year.

After four years of persistent effort and strong support from parents and alumni, we are thrilled to announce that we have reached our goal of creating a \$500,000 endowment fund, which will be used to support scholarships at Pacific Primary. A very generous donation of \$120,000 from a Pacific Primary family allowed us to meet the scholarship challenge more than a year ahead of schedule! The level of support was truly inspiring and is an awesome reflection on Pacific Primary parents and alumni. Our appreciation and gratitude extends to all of those who contributed to the endowment challenge over the past four years.