

\$130,000 from Anonymous Donor Makes SchoolPower History

by Samantha Washer

“When you do it, you have a lot of fun” ... “If you’re not doing well on something, it teaches you how” ... “I’m doing much better in math” ... This is what some Laguna elementary students are saying about the impact of SuccessMaker software, the tool that makes individualized assessment and child-specific course work standard for every student.

One family’s surprising generosity has quickly advanced Laguna schools’ implementation of this software. A recent \$130,000 donation to SchoolPower enabled LBUSD schools to expand the use of SuccessMaker software and mini-laptops to all fourth and fifth grade classrooms at El Morro and Top of the World Elementary Schools.

Educators are quick to point out that the software doesn’t replace good teaching. Teachers are impressed, however, with the role it plays in the classroom. According to Top of the World teacher Brian Kull, SuccessMaker lets each student work at his or her own individual math level. Its reporting helps teachers identify areas where a student needs one-on-one help. El Morro teacher Heather Besecker adds, “I can pull small groups aside based on the reports I’ve received and work with those individual groups ... and all of the students are able to work at a challenging math pace.”

Last fall, after the donor approached SchoolPower President Robin Rounaghi about making a difference in Laguna schools, joint discussions took place with district leaders about potential areas of investment. According to Rounaghi, “This went forward not only because of the incredible generosity of this family, who wishes to remain anonymous, but also because educators had done their homework. This donor asked all the right questions, and thanks to significant advance work, district leaders had the answers.” LBUSD had funded and piloted the program in fourth grade at El Morro and fifth grade at Top of the World last year and had the data and reports from teachers to show that it worked.

When the donor announced the amount of the impending contribution, which is the largest anyone can remember in the organization’s 29-year history, SchoolPower and district leaders were blown away. “That was a good meeting!” summed up Rounaghi. Superintendent Sherine Smith added, “Such generosity is unique to the Laguna Beach community. We are amazed and grateful for the support we receive.”

Asked to comment about the inspiration behind this gift, the donor responded, “in today's world of financially strained federal, state and local governments, we all have to dig deep to foster the learning of the MOST important asset we have as a community -- our children’s learning.”

SchoolPower trustees hope that the donation and its impact will inspire donors at any level of giving to support SchoolPower’s 2011 Fund-a-Need, which would expand the purchase of SuccessMaker for the third grade at both elementary schools. Each year a “Fund-a-Need” is selected and funded by donors at the SchoolPower Dinner Dance and online through the

SchoolPower website. The 2011 SuccessMaker Fund-a-Need was unanimously recommended by district leaders and approved by SchoolPower's Board of Trustees this fall.

Laguna teachers and students discuss the benefits of SuccessMaker in a video created by LBUSD Director of Technology Victor Guthrie and Thurston teacher Andy Crisp, which can be viewed on the SchoolPower website. Donations to the SuccessMaker Fund-a-Need may be made by contacting SchoolPower (949-494-6811 / www.lbschoolpower.org) or at the SchoolPower Dinner Dance on January 29.