

FUTURE NEWS HOUNDS



TOM GALLAGHER — Staff

Third-graders Donna Li (left) and Melissa Boland try out their journalism skills at James Madison School in San Leandro by working on a school's event column that will be published later in a school newspaper.

Microsociety Day gives students a taste of life in newspaper world

By Nancy Fong
STAFF WRITER

SAN LEANDRO — As a black rabbit named Ruby roamed the room, Jessica Davila's classmates worked at their desks as she conducted a phone interview standing behind a door.

The James Madison second-grader was working on a local news story concerning garbage, and that's where the classroom's only phone happened to be.

Although Davila would normally work at a desk, too, this particular day was different.

It was Microsociety Day, and she was doing her job as a reporter.

The schoolwide program, which began in October, is intended to teach students about the grown-up world by re-creating institutions — including a bank, post office, government, courts and a newspaper — in miniature.

Students must apply for positions. Once hired, they spend a class period once a week working at their jobs.

Learning the ropes

Hoping to generate some understanding with her story, the young journalist called San Leandro City Councilwoman Joanne Lothrop and area garbage workers about a new curbside pickup program. To understand how the community felt, she conducted a survey of her school.

"I'm trying to get different people's sides," she said.

"I haven't been able to get a hold of some."

“*(Being a reporter) is cool to have something new to do every day. Also, I'll know what's going on in the city before everyone else.*

Jessica Davila

James Madison Elementary School second-grader

She added, "People like curbside pickup because it saves money and time. They don't want to pay more. But some are concerned about people who can't bring their garbage to the curb."

Because Davila doesn't have a newsroom with a computer, a desk and a phone, she makes do with teacher Heather Buchanan's classroom and the phone behind the door.

Going to press

Davila's classmates are working to put out the rest of the paper, which, according to fifth-grader and Editor in Chief Emmanuel Velez, will probably go to press next month.

Although he was unsure of the newspaper's deadline as of yet, he said, "I make sure everyone meets their deadline, and I lay it all out and make sure it fits."

With the exception of a loose deadline, kids learn what it's really like to put out a newspaper. In addition, they learn about its organization.

Teachers Brook Maring and Cathy Samuelson helped the would-be publishers brainstorm to come

up with news sections that will include local news, weather, sports, school events, discovery topics and a funnies page.

In addition, the group has its own advice columnist and advertising staff.

"They're expected to come up with topics and write articles," said Samuelson.

Local news reporter Heather Kono profiled San Leandro Police Chief Bob Maginnis.

Her advice to reporter hopefuls: "Speak up."

Reporters in training

With pencil and encyclopedia in hand, weather reporter and fourth-grader William Lau prepared to write his article.

"You get to write about all kinds of weather and learn about the weather," he said.

Of being a reporter, Davila said, "It's cool to have something new to do every day. Also, I'll know what's going on in the city before everyone else."