

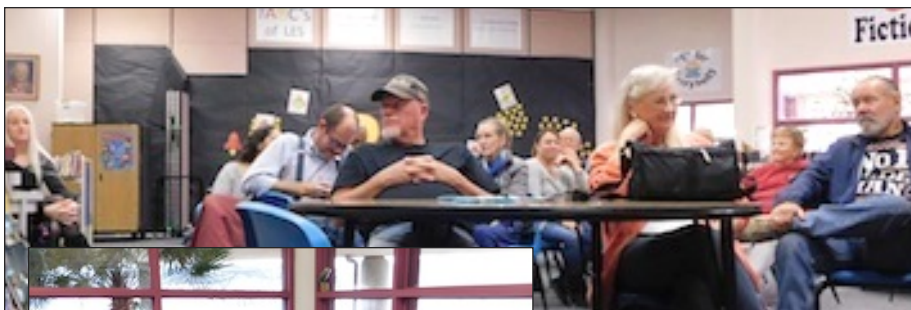
Landers Elementary!

Eye-opening! Never knew this school was like this. Kid-friendly. Friendly, period. A family atmosphere.

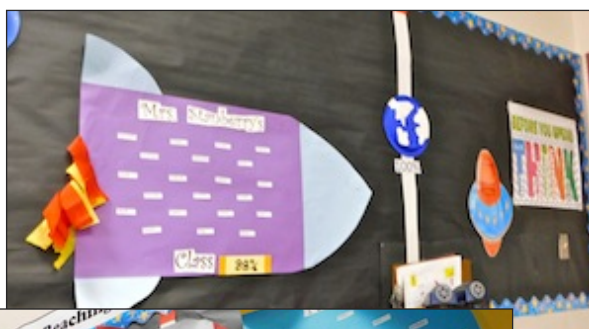
After the January 16th special meeting of the HVCC at Landers Elementary School, we heard these comments and more as we toured classrooms, computer lab, and the colorfully-decorated halls.

It seems a perfect storm of changes has caused concern in the Homestead Valley over the future of this small but advanced rural school. Shrinking population, fewer families, more homes sold for vacation rentals or retirees, all these were brought up as factors contributing to the shocking drop in enrollment this year.

The last school year ended with 163; this year opened with 125 (though that number had increased to 140, partially due to out-of-area parents' preference for Landers Elementary).



Community members gather in the school library, surrounded by books, colorful bulletin board competitions and school awards



Landers' traditionally small classroom sizes, a positive advantage, can be outweighed in today's numbers game for schools' support. When a retired teacher cannot be replaced and grades need to be combined, small numbers become a negative.

But many positives remain: well-educated teachers who know all the kids, inventive after-school activities, parent involvement, and support from dedicated community members equals an impressive learning atmosphere.

Suggestions from the meeting included ways to boost enrollment and employ underused facilities for other educational purposes, including evening adult classes. A Wish List for restoring former educational benefits is long. The incentives and achievements that permeate the school's atmosphere need more publicity, to let newcomers and homeschoolers know how all this can benefit their kids. HVCC can help with this.

We can certainly publicize fundraising events, such as the big auction held on February 28, of items and services donated by businesses in the area, Yucca Valley and beyond.