

Superintendent Rick Schmitt's Monthly Update

April 2015

Superintendent Schmitt plans to update the greater San Dieguito Union High School District community through our local media with a monthly update. Topics covered will include curriculum, facilities, budget, enrollment, safety, and other specific and special interest topics. Today's update focuses on new California assessments and school enrollment.

The Smarter Balanced Tests Reflect Higher, More Rigorous Standards

In late April, students across the San Dieguito Union High School District (SDUHSD) will prepare to take the new Smarter Balanced (SBAC) assessments in grades 7-8 and 11 as a component of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). These tests have been designed to assess both content knowledge as well as critical thinking skills in our students. As I have noted in previous columns, this is a significant shift from what former state standardized tests expected of our students. The former exams focused solely on academic content and material that could be memorized and focused on students' ability to recall information. The new instructional shifts that are occurring in Common Core classrooms throughout the state include an increase in reading, writing, speaking, and 21st Century skills and cannot be assessed relying solely on student recall. We have always prided ourselves on the deep level of cognitive rigor that occurs in our classrooms and realize that this new type of assessment will only enhance our students' academic future and ultimately benefit them in being College and Career ready. For many years our AP and Honors students have been assessed on critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the SAT and ACT have been aligned to the Common Core standards and will also assess critical thinking skills.

It is important to note that the SBAC assessments are the culmination of ongoing collaboration between the K-12 school community and our post-secondary institutions. As noted in a letter from the leaders of the University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (i.e. University of Southern California and Stanford) systems to the State Board of Education in 2014, "Our collaborative efforts will help ensure that the tests measure standards that our K-12 and higher education systems all agree address appropriate expectations for the preparation of high school graduates who are ready to succeed. It is critical that students arrive at college better prepared for the kind of inquiry based learning and collaborative problem-solving that defines twenty-first century learning. These assessments align with our commitment to new learning outcomes to ensure our graduates are ready to succeed in an increasingly complex global environment." The education community realizes the need to shift to a more accurate testing system that truly assesses the deep level of knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in today's ever evolving world.

With the introduction of the new standardized testing system, the state of California has taken the unprecedented step of suspending the statewide accountability system in place since 1999 that included a school Academic Performance Index (API). Though each school site will not have an API for this year we will be able to provide each student with an individual score report. Student Score Reports will be sent home to parents over the summer and will include an overall score, a description of the student's achievement level for English–Language Arts and Mathematics, and other information. It is important to note that these scores cannot be compared to scores that your child previously received on the STAR Program tests because this test is based on the new Common Core State Standards, involves different types of test questions, and will not be reported using the STAR Program reporting categories.

We look forward to working with our schools, teachers, and families as we begin this new era of assessment in California. Our school principals will be continually communicating in regards to testing dates for our schools as well as resources available for students and parents to provide ongoing support during this time of change.

Middle School & High School Enrollment

On March 18, 2015 we were very excited to announce that all students who legally participated in our High School Selection process this spring were admitted to their school of choice for the 2015-16 school year. This included all incoming freshmen as well as all upper grade students. We were able to accomplish this thanks to working diligently to efficiently utilize existing facilities at each of our high schools and due to increased long-range capacity solutions at three of our high schools, all part of our long-range facilities master plan and the associated Prop AA funding. Our goal each year is to do our very best to accommodate all students at their first choice school.

In addition to high school enrollment, we were also able to admit close to 600 transfers among our five middle schools for the 2015-16 school year. Every SDUHSD middle school student who applied for an intra-district transfer to a middle school within our district was approved for the 2015-16 school year. This was due to available capacity at each middle school, including Carmel Valley MS for the first time in a decade. With the fall 2015 opening of our new Pacific Trails MS, we had enough capacity at each of our five middle schools to accommodate all transfer requests which means that each middle school student will also attend his or her first choice school in 2015-16. Transfers are from within SDUHSD boundaries. SDUHSD does not accept students from outside the school district.

Moving forward, we continue to work with our community to examine how we can best accommodate enrollment demand at our high schools in the future. Our High School Enrollment Study Group has hosted four community workshops over the last month to educate community members about enrollment options and to seek feedback on options. Over the next month, we will host additional workshops for families in our elementary feeder schools. Upon completion of these workshops, we will survey our community regarding enrollment topics and then present to our Board of Trustees all of the information gathered from the community. Any resulting changes to our enrollment practices would take effect with the 2016-17 school year at the earliest and would not impact students already enrolled in our high schools at that time.

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