

## Superintendent Rick Schmitt's Monthly Update

May 10, 2016

*Superintendent Schmitt regularly updates the greater San Dieguito Union High School District (SDUHSD) community through our local media with a monthly update. Topics may include academics, facilities, budget, enrollment, safety, and other specific and special interest topics. Today's update focuses on celebrating student success with an eye on continuous improvement & safe learning environments.*

### Celebrating Students / Always Looking for Continuous Improvement

The San Dieguito Union High School District (SDUHSD) is made up of great schools with great teachers and students supported by wonderful staff and families. We offer students a wide array of high quality curricular and extracurricular programs in academics, arts, and athletics. Our students excel, consistently achieving at the highest levels and matriculating to the best universities and careers.

In the 2015-16 school year, we achieved new highs in both the number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) tests and the number of AP tests taken while increasing our AP pass rate to 85%, the highest pass rate in SDUHSD history. The average pass rate nationwide is 48%. We also had 79 students earn the honor of qualifying as Semi-Finalists for the National Merit Scholarship by scoring in the top 0.5% of all students on the Practice Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). These 79 Semi-Finalists represent the most students in the history of our district and the largest number of any district in San Diego County.

SDUHSD students also participated for the first time in the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), our state's new standards-aligned assessment, and achieved significantly better than county and state averages. These stellar results reflect our ongoing efforts to improve student learning and our work over the last three years to align our curriculum, instruction, and assessment to new state standards.

It would be easy for our district to become complacent, but to do so would ignore the fact that we can get better. We are obligated to improve in all phases of our organization. In pursuit of this, we annually develop a district Education Plan which provides a focus for our strategy to improve.

While student learning and academic achievement is a primary focus, our Education Plan also reflects our commitment to the overall health and wellness of our students. We are acutely aware that the achievements of our students both in and out of the classroom often come with added pressure and stress and we work to help students find balance between expectations and health. Each of our schools engage in efforts to support student wellness, ranging from Wellness Days to Family Nights with no homework assigned to ongoing community building activities facilitated by student groups like Peer Assistance Listeners (PALS).

Our Education Plan is updated each spring for the following school year with input from our Board of Trustees, staff, and parents. The intent of the document is to identify and reflect our key priorities across our organization. Once developed, I share our plan with parents through my regular participation parent meetings at school sites and through our district-level advisory committees. This spring, we are engaged in a more thorough development process for our 2016-17 Education Plan. A group of representative parents, students, staff, and board members will review the data related to a wide variety of student outcomes and identify areas for focus moving forward. Based upon this analysis, staff will develop work plans intended to address the identified needs and this will drive our improvement efforts moving into 2016-17 and beyond.

### **Safe Learning Environments**

San Dieguito Union High School District is one of the highest ranked school districts in the state every year and this is a testament to our amazing staff, students', and families' hard work and dedication to student success. Not only is SDUHSD known for its top ranking in academics but we also pride ourselves as a district that has safe learning environments for students.

SDUHSD is one of the safest school districts in the state as evidenced by our continued low suspension and expulsion rates that continue to decline. In an effort to maintain safety on our campuses and to further promote harmonious learning environments for students and staff, the schools utilize a variety of strategies including the use of restorative practices.

The foundation of restorative practice rests on the common values of respect, inclusion, responsibility, empathy, honesty, openness, and accountability. Restorative practices and the ideas behind them contrast with more punitive approaches by empowering students to resolve conflicts on their own and in small groups, to repair harm, and to restore relationships between all affected.

Administrators, teachers, counselors, school psychologists and other staff members at each of our school sites have been trained to use restorative practices with students. Teams have subsequently used their training to work with colleagues to implement restorative practices at their schools.

Over the past few years, SDUHSD has shown a steady decline in the number of suspensions and expulsions. During the 2008-2009 school year, 669 home suspensions were issued to students. During the 2014-2015 school year, only 204 home suspensions were issued. During the 2009-2010 school year there were 20 expulsions district-wide. In 2014-15 there were only 8 expulsions; a much lower figure than the County average. We believe that the use of restorative practices has helped lower these statistics. We are confident that the result of employing restorative practices at SDUHSD is an effective alternative to suspension and expulsion and will continue to reduce student misconduct.

As we continue our Prop AA construction we will place an emphasis on increasing security for our students and staff whenever possible. The district has funded the development and implementation of plans to install perimeter fencing, access gates, and security cameras.

Over the last several years we have worked diligently with our students to promote the "see something, say something" pledge. They have responded by letting staff know every day if they

hear or see something that could be a potential hazard to student safety. Students at all of our sites are involved with promoting student safety through various clubs and activities, recognizing that safety is not just what is seen in terms of fencing and gates, but is more importantly felt by our students. California Healthy Kids Survey results continue to show that our students agree that SDUHSD schools are safe places for students. Students and staff have also developed wellness committees to discuss ways to promote a safe and well balanced education at our schools. We partner with local organizations to support our work, including the San Dieguito Alliance for Drug Free Youth, which hosts an assortment of events for our students, and the Anti-Defamation League that supported each one of our schools in conducting at least three events this year that were focused on increasing students connections and safety on campus.

Each one of our schools has focused on student “wellness.” Each of our schools has established Wellness Committees that work with students and staff to promote student health and positive choices. One example of this was at Earl Warren Middle School where they recently held a “Wellness Week” for their students that included several activities aimed at healthy lifestyles. Events included yoga sessions and a Family Night for students that included no homework for all students that also coincided with a barbeque at a local park for families to attend that was sponsored by their PTSA. These types of events occur throughout our district.

SDUHSD will continue to focus on safety and the overall well-being of all students. Our regular parent, student, and staff surveys continue to show that our schools are safe places for students. I commend our community for its focus on student safety as a priority, and I look forward to continuing to provide safe and world class learning environments for our students and families to enjoy.

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