Teaching and Learning

Professional Learning on Balanced Literacy

Twenty-eight SCUSD elementary school principals met at H.W. Harkness Elementary School on Tuesday to engage in collaborative professional learning focused on building an effective school-wide Comprehensive Balanced Literacy program. This professional development is part of the district’s system-wide shift towards a Comprehensive Balanced Literacy model for literacy curriculum, instruction and assessment. The session was facilitated by Harkness Principal Eric Chapman and Dr. Iris Taylor, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Harkness Elementary School was strategically selected as the site for this meeting because, under the leadership of Principal Chapman, it has been on a four-year journey of implementing Balanced Literacy and has experienced great success. Harkness serves as a lab site for effective practice within the district.

Principals worked with their colleagues to deepen their understanding of: the fundamental components of a balanced literacy program; classroom rituals and routines critical to implementation; and school structures and systems needed to support and sustain success. Principals visited classrooms, debriefed their visits and set goals for continued learning. Three more sessions are scheduled for this school year. The training will expand to include additional principals in 2012-13.

SCUSD Selected for Participation in National Initiative

SCUSD has been selected for a national initiative to make social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of every student’s educational experience. Sponsored by the Novo Foundation and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SCUSD will participate with seven other large school districts throughout the nation that are committed to systemic, comprehensive implementation of SEL. The selected districts will work with CASEL to:

- Build knowledge about how to organize high-quality, systemic, district-wide implementation of SEL.
- Create tools and resources that districts can use to achieve systemic SEL implementation.
• Document the short- and long-term effects of such systemic efforts.
• Serve as demonstration sites that others can visit to observe systemic SEL in action.

Selected districts will receive ongoing technical assistance and financial support from the NoVo Foundation. Top leaders from each district will also have regular opportunities to meet with their counterparts in other districts with the goal of creating a national learning community on SEL.

A planning grant of $125,000 is expected to be awarded in early 2012 with the possibility of applying for three years of implementation grants totaling $750,000.

Operations

*Mid-Year ‘Trigger’ Cuts Less than Feared*

Governor Brown and the state Department of Finance (DOF) on Tuesday released a budget forecast for the remainder of this fiscal year that was more optimistic than expected. The DOF predicts that California’s revenue will fall $2.2 billion behind projections, as opposed to the $3.7 billion projected by the Legislative Analyst’s Office earlier.

The forecast spares K-12 education the brunt of mid-year trigger cuts, which will fall to higher education and social services. Still, the state will cut our transportation funds by half and reduce our ADA revenue by $13 a student, resulting in a reduction to SCUSD’s budget of $2.5 million beginning in January. This is far less than the $12 million in mid-year cuts we had anticipated but a blow to our finances nonetheless. The district is looking at using one-time funds, operating reductions and reserves to make up for the shortfall.

On a side note, the district may face mid-year trigger cuts again next year as the Governor has said that he intends to predicate the state’s 2012-13 budget on passage of his tax initiative headed for the November ballot.

*New Website Gets ‘Soft Launch’*

Efforts are continuing to transform the district’s outdated website into a more parent-friendly, interactive and attractive product for our community. A new website went “live” today for preview purposes. This “soft launch” will allow the district to work out any kinks over the two-week winter break. The new site has far more functionality, is easier to navigate and update and will allow the district to improve its community outreach through videos, photo galleries, surveys and a fresher design. Look for the site to continue to evolve through the coming months.
Priority Schools Tour

Fourteen legislative staffers from the state Capitol toured three Priority Schools – Jedediah Smith, Hiram Johnson and Fern Bacon – on Wednesday. The tour was coordinated through City Councilman Jay Schenirer’s Capital Impact organization. At each campus, the staffers met with principals, teachers and students to learn about programs and improvements that are helping to boost student learning.