October 21, 2011

Teaching and Learning

SCUSD Selected to Apply for Grant

SCUSD has been selected as one of five finalists for an opportunity to participate in a nationwide initiative to promote social and emotional learning. Sponsored by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), participation in this initiative is designed to deepen each district’s capacity to integrate social and emotional learning in all aspects of the educational experience.

If selected, SCUSD will receive a planning grant of $125K with the possibility of a $250K implementation grant each year for the ensuing three years. In addition, SCUSD will receive technical assistance from CASEL and the opportunity to participate in a national learning support community of school districts focused on the integration of social and emotional learning.

A three-day site visit by a team of five leaders in the field of social and emotional learning will help determine the selection process. The site visit will take place November 14-16 with a final decision in December. This is a wonderful opportunity for SCUSD to expand its already deep work in this area and to become more fully invested in adopting a whole child approach to education.

Library-based Student Coaching Programs

Homework Coaching programs are off to a very successful start at Martin Luther King Jr. and the Colonial Heights Public Libraries. The Homework Zone at Martin Luther King Jr. Library opened on September 6 and is averaging 12 students per session. The program at Colonial Heights Library began on September 27 and is averaging six students per session. Days and hours of operation for both Homework Zones are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Sixteen volunteers have been trained as homework coaches – eight for each site. Volunteers have been recruited from three Retired Teachers Associations events, UC Davis Community Service Program, Sacramento City College and local Sacramento and Elk Grove area high schools. The volunteers have come from a variety of backgrounds, including
several current or retired teachers, retired military personnel, an engineer, a business professional, a consultant, as well as several UC Davis students and two outstanding high school students. An article about the Homework Zones was featured in Sacramento Press on October 12 to highlight volunteer Homework Coaches providing free support for students to complete their homework assignments.

Homework Coaches help the students with math, science, reading, history and other assignments. Students are responsible for bringing their own materials and assignments. In the libraries, students have access to the online service Homework HelpNow and other databases via computers.

**Common Core Standards Work Team Meetings**

This week SCUSD’s two common core work teams met to continue the implementation of the CA Common Core Standards. The work of the two groups focused on helping students understand and write narrative texts. Cohort A, comprised of 57 teachers representing grades preK-12, convened to continue development of performance-based interim assessments begun in August. Teachers collaborated in grade level teams to analyze student work samples, reflect on implementation and revise their assessment items based on what was learned. Cohort B, comprised of teacher teams from 22 early implementation sites, met to create classroom assignments and instructional plans. Teachers analyzed the standards and collaborated in grade level teams to design a standards learning progression, reading and writing tasks or assignments and an instructional plan. The two groups will meet again in December when they will focus the work on supporting students to read and write expository or informational texts.

**Accountability Tools**

The Accountability office continues to facilitate the use of the new tools. The School Quality Review (SQR) outlines the details of the "Ideal Sacramento School." SQR teams visited Caleb Greenwood, Cesar Chavez, Hubert Bancroft, Sam Brannan, CB Wire and James Marshall this week. This completes the fall round of SQRs with 15 more schools to be reviewed in the spring. School Development and Improvement Plans (SDIPs) outline each school’s goals for the year in terms of working towards being the "Ideal Sacramento School." The Data Inquiry Process is being used to give the schools a "shared way" to construct their SDIP, monitor their progress towards becoming better and focus on continuous improvement. The second year of Data Inquiry is underway. In the first year, we trained all groups in the inquiry process. This year, we have organized groups of schools to work with one another as a network. Together, these networks will explore common problems of practice through a combination of group learning and school site visitation. This is a huge step toward fulfilling
our Strategic Plan Pillar 3 goal of Organizational Transformation as we strive to connect all of our accountability initiatives.

**Alternative Teacher Induction**

Through grant funding from the Workforce Investment Board, SCUSD and California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) are collaborating to create and implement an Alternative Induction Program for teachers. This program would target recently laid-off beginning teachers who have five-year, preliminary teaching credentials. At the end of five years, to continue to teach in public schools, these teachers must complete an induction program to “clear” their credential, or move on to a Level II credential. Currently, SCUSD offers the BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment) Induction Program for fully employed teachers. The Alternative Induction Program would give recently laid-off novice teachers an opportunity to clear their credentials by teaching before-school or after-school classes in math or science under the tutelage, and with the support of experienced teachers in these fields of study. In addition, participating teachers will complete all the requirements of the state’s Formative Assessment for California Teachers (FACT) system.

SCUSD surveyed possible candidates for this program to gauge interest. Of the 80 SCUSD laid-off beginning teachers (at the time of the survey), more than 50 percent returned the survey in just four days and showed overwhelming interest in this program. This program is set to begin at the end of this month.

In addition, the district is currently working with CSUS to submit a proposal to funders that would create Foundational Level General Science and Foundational Level Math supplemental credentials for recently laid-off teachers. We expect to hear news about the funding of this project at the end of November, and will have more information at that time.

**Auditors Arrive at Serna**

The external auditors from Crowe Horwath (formerly Perry-Smith, LLP) arrived at the Serna Center on Monday to begin their work on the financial audit. Many departments provide information and meet with the auditors to work towards a clean fiscal audit. Auditors are physically here for approximately two weeks and then finalize their work in their home office. The audit report will be presented to the Board in December or early January.

**Food Safety Training Grant**

SCUSD’s Nutrition Services has been selected to participate in a California Department of Education (CDE)/UC Davis grant for Food Safety Training.

The grant gives Nutrition Services the opportunity to train and certify in safe food handling through webinars and classroom-style professional developments. In turn, Nutrition Services will help evaluate this mode of training for CDE. Staff from 75 SCUSD schools have signed up to participate.
SCUSD Hosts Education Coalition News Conference

The Education Coalition, a consortium of education stakeholder groups formed to fight against funding cuts to public schools, held a news conference at Washington Elementary School on Wednesday. Speakers included Washington’s Principal Marilyn Garcia Collins, Superintendent Raymond, Sacramento City Teachers Association President Scott Smith, SEIU Local 790 President Crawford Johnson, Sacramento Council of PTAs President Lily Williams, SCUSD Board of Education Member Ellyne Bell and Priscilla Cox, California School Board Association Region 6 Director and an Elk Grove Unified School District board member. The Education Coalition is staging press conferences throughout California to bring public attention to the devastating effects of more than $18 billion in cuts to schools in the last three years. A new California Budget Project report ranks the state 46th in both per-pupil spending and the number of students per administrator (301), and worst in the U.S. in the number of students per teacher (20.5) and per school librarian (5,489).

Red Ribbon Week Kick-Off Event

A kick-off assembly for national Red Ribbon Week (October 24-28) was held this morning at Mark Hopkins Elementary School. Internationally acclaimed opera duo Roy Stevens and Annalisa Winberg, who perform as AmazingVox, performed at two assemblies for students. Following the singers, student hip-hop dancers and spoken-word poetry artists performed a rap (“It’s Up to Me to Be Drug Free”). Students in the audience wore sunglasses to support the event’s theme “Shade-Out Drugs.”

Red Ribbon Week is the oldest and largest drug prevention campaign in the country. It commemorates the death of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, who died at the hands of drug traffickers in Mexico in 1988.

‘Get Smart About Credit’ Day

Bankers from Wells Fargo visited John F. Kennedy and Luther Burbank high schools on Thursday, national “Get Smart About Credit Day,” and gave a mini-lesson to students on “Saving to Buy a Car” with an emphasis on making smart financial decisions that protect their futures. “Get Smart About Credit Day” is part of a national campaign by volunteer bankers to help young people develop responsible habits concerning finances. As part of the campaign, SCUSD Board Member Donald Terry led a brown bag lunch seminar at the Serna Center on Thursday about credit scores, managing credit and consumer rights when it comes to banking.