

From: Bina Lefkowitz
Sent: Wednesday, April 7, 2021 8:00 PM
To: SCUSD Public Comment
Subject: Item 8.1 comment April 8th board meeting

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Dear SCUSD Board of Trustees and Superintendent Aguilar

I am writing as a local advocate for youth, a parent of two SCUSD graduates, and a volunteer who worked on the early roll out of the district's social and emotional learning efforts. For many of our students COVID and racial injustices have increased anxiety, depression, trauma and loneliness. Isolated from friends, teachers and enrichment activities, our students are desperate for connection, safe spaces to process the overwhelming events of this past year and re-engagement opportunities.

I was glad to see item 8.1 summer programming on your agenda. I respectfully submit the following ideas. Not knowing the staff recommendations, I apologize if my comments are already addressed or off track.

I believe it is critical for the district to offer summer school programming that is highly engaging (think summer camps, arts, sports, cultural expression, civic engagement, experiential learning), providing emotionally, culturally and physically safe spaces for students to reconnect and address social/emotional and mental health needs as a first priority. For those ready and interested, the summer school should include access to targeted academic learning support based on students' needs/interests.

In terms of SEL and mental health supports- we know creating positive connection opportunities for students and rebuilding relationships is most critical and highly effective, making in person programming important as well as protocols that incorporate SEL best practices such as of check in's, relationship/community building activities, and optimistic closing activities, in all summer courses.

Students would be well served if the summer school program included a mental health and wellness strand for all students. Educating students around mental health and wellness and providing safe spaces to talk about feelings helps normalize mental health and reduces stigma. Mental health literacy could include how one's brain works, defining mental health and wellness, trauma and resiliency, culturally based wellness practices, the impact of racism and poverty on mental wellbeing, coping skills, and where to seek help if you need it. Including a service-learning component to the class could increase student engagement and agency. Examples of projects students might identify include peer education around mental health, problem based projects where students identify a need and solution (such as creating a health fair, organizing a meditation class, or advocating to change a school policy), create a media campaign around mental health awareness, create a club structure for the fall to carry on the work.

A summer program strand offered by district teachers or CBO partners, around mental health and wellness could help the district develop on going curriculum that could be used during the school year to improve student mental health literacy for all students. This could move the district towards meeting the new health framework adopted by the state in 2019. The service-learning component could help students meet criteria to earn the new state civic seal. Furthermore, the district is encouraged to consider a summer school model that includes stipends to high school students- much like the " youth earn and learn" model create by the City of Sacramento that offers \$500 per person stipend for 20 hours of

training and 20 hours of service. This would address some of the financial distress many of our students and their families have faced as well as provide incentives for students to participate in summer programming.

We know that students prefer to talk to their peers or near peers about mental health/ wellness. Peer programs have been shown to be a highly effective strategy. The district can build on the EQ Ambassadors, GSA Clubs, etc to create a peer mental health program model. There are several CBO developed models of peer and near peer mental health and wellness programs that the district could partner with such as Mental Wellness Champions, Peers Helping Peers, Peer Health Exchange and Healing Centered Schools(to name a few). There are interested community partners who would be willing to work with the district to help design ongoing peer program models that could be implemented this summer and fall in our schools. Between expected new federal and state funds, we believe there will be sufficient resources to support peer mental health program development and implementation; even including stipends to students for participating as peer or near peer mentors around mental health and wellness.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Bina Lefkowitz

Advocate

Youth Development Consultant

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My best to you!

Bina Lefkowitz