



SPRING 2020



THE DISTRICT BRIDGE
Changing Times. Unchanged Priorities.



Dear Friends,

With quiet hallways and empty playgrounds, our campuses feel very different now than they did just a few short months ago. I am looking forward to the day students can safely return to their classrooms.

For now, our brick-and-mortar schools have given way to learning venues tucked into homes throughout our city. Kitchen islands and dining room tables have become the settings for our virtual classrooms, where students can interact with their teachers and classmates, and parents can get support for their children's learning.

This edition of The District Bridge offers a glimpse into the creation of our virtual schoolhouse. Its architects are our teachers, para-educators, technology experts, psychologists, and social workers, who leapt into action immediately upon hearing that we needed to temporarily close campuses. I am so grateful to them, and to every one of our teachers, who have flexed to meet the changing needs of our students. Our distance learning program reflects their deep dedication to the children we serve and shows real consideration for the challenges families are facing.

Working in partnership with parents, and with our community's support, we will get through this time together.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin H. Picard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Benjamin H. Picard, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Sunnyvale School District

OUR SCHOOLS

Bishop Elementary
Cherry Chase Elementary
Cumberland Elementary
Ellis Elementary
Fairwood Explorer
Lakewood Tech EQ
San Miguel Elementary
Vargas Elementary
Columbia Middle
Sunnyvale Middle

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Jeffrey Arnett
Michelle Maginot
Reid Myers
Nancy Newkirk
Bridget Watson

Changing times. Unchanged priorities.

Our first order of business was to ensure that our children who count on school breakfasts and lunches continue to receive those essential meals. We are so grateful to our food services team, which immediately switched to pre-packed, bagged meals so families can safely retrieve them through a drive-through station. We have distributed more than 100,000 meals since schools were closed, including frozen dinners, which were added to the menu in April.

We are also distributing more groceries from our schools. In recent years, Sunnyvale School District partnered with local nonprofit agency Sunnyvale Community Services to create food distribution centers at four of our schools, making donated groceries more accessible to local families in need.

We are now able provide more food, more often, thanks to additional support for the program, provided by community partners like Assistance League of Los Altos. This support fills a critical need for local families, many of whom lost their jobs and their incomes during the shelter-in-place order.





Six thousand classrooms

We knew that technology would be a critical tool in our distance-learning plan, so faculty and staff gathered information as to which of our more than 6000 students would need to be provided with devices. Fortunately, our existing one-to-one technology program helped with getting electronic devices into the hands of our students.

We also purchased and provided 200 hotspots so that all students could access the Internet from their homes. District teams cleaned headphones, chargers, and devices to get them ready to check out to families. We implemented staggered pick-ups and used other safety measures to ensure proper physical distancing before we arranged for devices to be checked out.

Families were able to collect devices during meal distributions and by appointment at our schools, and our teachers and principals personally and safely delivered some devices directly to students' homes. We also provided basic school supplies — paper, pencils, math worksheets — to families so students could fully engage in their lessons.

Special thanks to Google and Lockheed Martin for their generous donations to help provide hotspots, devices, and other supplies to enable distance learning!

In our virtual schoolhouse

Our teachers and instructional coaches prepare and lead lessons in core subjects at all grade levels. In their online classrooms, children access live talks, pre-recorded lessons, reading materials, and other assignments.

Students interact directly with their teachers and peers through Zoom meetings, Google Meet and other face-to-face platforms. When possible, teachers facilitate group projects so children can virtually connect with friends and continue to build important collaboration skills. In addition to core content lessons, students may participate in enrichment activities such as physical education and visual and performing arts.

While the classroom may look different, we are working to maintain our strong sense of community. We've held spirit weeks, back-to-school nights, assemblies, coffees with the principals and even fifth and eighth grade promotion ceremonies. They've just gone online! Being able to see one another's faces, whether live or recorded, warms our hearts and has helped us stay connected during this time.





A little TLC

These strange times are emotionally taxing for us all, so we are grateful to be able to continue our services for children with existing challenges in social-emotional or behavioral health through tele-therapy services, remote group therapies, and social skills groups. Staff continue to provide speech and occupational therapies, sometimes with essential assistance from parents and guardians. (For example, an occupational therapist may have a family member create an at-home scavenger hunt — a fun way to employ both gross and fine motor skills, aiding in physical development.)

In fact, all our parents and guardians are playing so many roles right now, they deserve special recognition. These are stressful times for families, and adding school-from-home to their list of responsibilities can be a daunting prospect.

That's why a full wing of our virtual schoolhouse is dedicated to social-emotional wellness and self-care. Our wellness wing includes resources, games, and exercises designed to facilitate positive family communication and promote emotional wellness for all. **Because right now, the most important lesson of all is how to give and get a little TLC.**



Putting it all together

Just like our students, we are learning more every day.

We have simplified outreach, so families can more easily focus on the most important priorities. We have increased technology support to teachers, as well as to families who may be using these tools for the first time. We have provided ideas for families to keep children engaged during non-school hours, when they might normally be playing with their friends. (Many even became armchair travelers during spring break through daily virtual field trips to national parks!) We are also developing virtual workshops aimed at the whole family to provide needed support during these rapidly changing times.

No matter how much things change, our foundational belief remains solid: every child can learn, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have every opportunity for academic, social, and emotional growth. This remains true, regardless of whether our students are in our classrooms or connecting with us from laptops in their homes.

We look forward to having our children back on campus when they can return safely! Until that time, we will continue to walk together with them and their families down this virtual learning path.



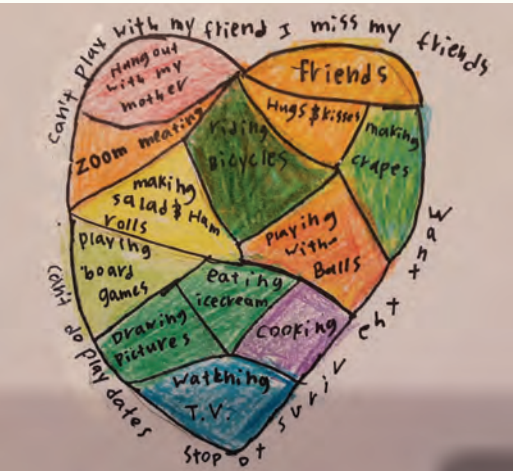
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Pandemic Journal by Erin