

## 2022-2025 Superintendent Goals Article #2

**Goal 2: School Connectedness & Engagement** – Facilitate systems and implement actions/projects that increase student, staff, and parent engagement and in-put in school activities to ensure stronger school connections.

### **Background, Description, and Rationale for Goal 2:**

School connectedness and engagement are critical components for ensuring student academic achievement and success. Parents/guardians engagement and connectedness within the school community are also elements of a fully robust student support system that allows high levels of student success. Being connected and engaged in the school community are part of the basic needs of students, staff, and community partners in the Maslow's Before Bloom's equation used by SUSD in addressing the wellness of its school community.

SUSD believes that quality mental health and well-being are essential to creating the conditions for members of its organization (students, staff, and parents) to become fully engaged and connected in school activities. Addressing the social-emotional needs of individuals through strong relationship driven practices allows students, staff, and parents to engage in a school environment that supports kindness, caring, and inclusivity. Because of the critical foundation that school connectedness and engagement play in student learning, it is the second goal for the superintendent. Once students are safe and secure (Goal 1), they must have their social emotional needs met so that maximum learning can occur (Goal 3).

### **Project A: Implement a plan, expectations, and actions to ensure that social-emotional needs of students and staff are addressed through systematic and systemic instruction and/or support resources.**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) instruction has been part of SUSD since January 2020. At that time the district introduced its Maslow's Before Bloom's initiative to address the various executive functioning skills needs and social skills needs exhibited in classrooms across the district. Shortly following the implementation of this initiative SUSD experienced the impacts of the COVID pandemic. This global crisis increased the social needs of students, especially our youngest students, as shutdowns, masking, and social distancing created societal environments that did not allow for the usual interactions needed for young children to develop and maintain appropriate relationship building skills, behavioral skills (i.e. impulse control, emotional control, self-monitoring and regulation), and cognitive skills (i.e. flexible thinking, working memory, planning and prioritizing, task initiation, and organization).

Part of SUSD's systematic approach to addressing each student's needs is to dedicate time for social-emotional learning to occur, to provide a consistent, targeted set of curricular materials, to include the support of clinically trained and licensed mental health providers (school social workers), and to monitor the implementation of these elements to ensure success. SUSD uses the Harmony SEL 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition curriculum (TK classes use Second Step) to ensure that students in grades TK-6 receive consistent high quality SEL instructional opportunities, while also ensuring that social skills appropriate to each grade level are received. Having consistent district-wide materials also allows more effective monitoring of student progress, or lack of progress, ensuring that supports are provided by our classroom teachers through re-teaching and by our mental health team member activities as needed. The district-wide expectation for daily social emotional learning activities allows all students have access to specific instruction that will build their individual social skills and provide them with the ability to fully engage in the academic setting of school.

Another component of the systematic approach to meeting social-emotional needs of students is to have a district-wide system of behavior that is predictable and accessible. In SUSD we use Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) to meet those behavioral demands. SUSD's PBIS systems are specific to each of the district's 15 school sites but allow for a series of effective research-based strategies that elicit positive behaviors by students in school. Our students understand the expectations for their behavior in a variety of settings within the school environment (i.e. play-ground, classroom, lunch area, etc.) allowing them to effectively engage in activities with their peers. If consequences are necessary, SUSD implements a restorative approach to maintain each student's dignity, and their relationships with school staff while engaging them in problem solving and repairing the harm done to the person or relationship. Research has demonstrated that use of restorative practices enhances school connectedness and positive school climate.

In addition to the two systems (SEL and PBIS), SUSD has also refined the manner in which it addresses the behavioral and mental health needs of its students. Through the use of licensed clinical staff (i.e. school social workers, behaviorists, etc.) SUSD is able to assess and appropriately address the needs of individual students who may have experienced trauma or who may have limited social interactions. Our clinical team supports students and teachers with strategies to improve behaviors allowing students to better engage with their peers or with classroom learning. These clinicians also provide additional mental health support to students or provide family support by referring them to outside agencies or other services. Supporting our students and their families through difficult times ensures that students will maintain their learning and connectedness to the school community despite any crisis they may experience.

The components of these programs and their implementation are reviewed monthly by our administrative team and our mental health staff by examining referrals for services, referrals to the office for behaviors, etc. Reviewing referral data and implementation practices data allows this team to adjust services to students and refine instructional activities to better meet the behavioral and social needs of students throughout the year.

Finally, SUSD has placed staff mental health and wellness as an important part of this project. We continue providing the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) sponsored Employee Assistance Service for Education (EASE) program to allow employees to receive short-term mental health or counseling support as well as long-term referral resources. This program allows our staff immediate support at a time when access to mental health services can take weeks to receive through individual insurance means.

Quality mental health is achieved through having strong social-emotional skills and having appropriate support systems when necessary. Our plan involves fostering these elements for all members of the school community.

**Project B: Implement MTSS plan to address behavior/mental health needs of students and continue to refine MTSS plan to address future needs.**

The Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) plan to address the behavioral/mental health needs of students is a three-part system that requires on-going monitoring and refinement to ensure student progress over time. Implementing a common system district-wide allows staff the ability to adjust services and strategies to meet the needs of individual and/or specific groups of students, while continuing to set expectations for behavior and social interactions across the district. The focus of the MTSS plan for behavior/mental health is a complex system of classroom, pull-out program, and individual student activities that ensure that each student receives the appropriate social-emotional support needed to be successful in school.

Tier 1 of the MTSS system are universal and addresses the regular, in-class instruction and school-wide expectations for behavior for ALL students. This tier ensures that students have access to research-based effective materials that are aligned to age appropriate behaviors and social skills. It also ensures that supplemental resources are consistently available across all 15 sites so that all students have resources needed to support them. Approximately 80% of all students will have their needs met by the activities provided in Tier 1.

Tier 2 of the MTSS system is layered upon Tier 1 activities and provides additional more refined or specific interventions for students who are struggling to with behaviors, trauma, crisis, or mental health related challenges. This tier may include regrouping of students in a grade level for additional support activities, bringing in support staff to monitor and adjust classroom settings/routines/actions, or altering individual student routines to allow them to be more successful within the larger group. Meeting with one of our school social workers can also be part of this tier and offer short term support for students. Tier 2 activities combined with Tier 1 activities addresses the needs of an additional 15% of the student population.

Tier 3 of the MTSS system is focused more toward the individual student and addresses the remaining 5% of the student population. By layering Tier 3 activities with the other tiers, students are provided with a full range of support. Tier 3 assistance may include the student study team (SST) process and working with students in very small groups or individually to ensure that the behavior needs or mental health needs of the student are addressed. This tier

emphasizes the individual needs of individual students, but is not a long-term solution for serious trauma or crisis. In the most serious situations, our mental health staff refer students for outside mental health support and additional assessments to supply them with the on-going support needed.

To gain a better understanding of the MTSS plan/process please review the Board presentation from May, 2022 ([file:///C:/Users/chawkins/Downloads/IV\\_A\\_MTSSBoardPresentation51722\\_0.pdf](file:///C:/Users/chawkins/Downloads/IV_A_MTSSBoardPresentation51722_0.pdf)).

**Project C: Implement protocols, practices, and supports to increase student attendance and immediately address students who are experiencing chronic attendance by providing school-based resources and staff to assist the student/family in improving attendance.**

We know that student attendance is a key factor to student academic success, but it is also a key component to their individual social development. By regularly being in a school environment our students are growing their social skills. They are exposed to relationships with others, engaged in activities that promote future success in group work and social interactions, and provided opportunities to develop the necessary social skills for engaging our society as adults. We learned during the pandemic that on-line learning can work, however, we also learned that there is no substitute for being together with other individuals and navigating the daily interactions with them.

SUSD is taking a four-part approach to school attendance – Education, Connection, Monitoring, and Affirmation. Educating all members of the school community (students, parents, and school staff) on the importance of regularly attending school is crucial. In the last two years we have encourage students with the slightest symptoms to stay at home. Now we see that it is more the more serious symptoms (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, etc.) that require students to stay home. Making that change involves education of the school community members so we can ensure students attend school regularly. Another piece of education is connecting current academic performance to individual student attendance. For example, a student who has missed 6 days of the 60 days enrolled has missed approximately 12 hours of reading instruction or 10% of the instructional time provided. The second part of SUSD’s approach to attendance is connection. When students feel connected to their school they are more likely to attend. Staff must provide activities and support systems to help each and every student feel part of the school community (i.e. SEL activities, classroom buddies, check-in/check-outs, etc.). Monitoring, of course, is the means to ensure that students are attending, but monitoring involves more than simply taking attendance. Monitoring includes determining why students are absent and helping them and their families with the resources needed to change behaviors so that attendance improves. Finally, affirmation is essential for those that regularly attend and for those that improve their attendance. Often, we focus on perfection, but that is too often not a realistic goal. People get sick, they have life experiences that force absence, or they need a “mental health day” to survive, but we can validate when those who have been excessively absent have improved. We can incentivize those who struggle with regular attendance to become connected and improve their attendance. The inter-connectivity of these four parts of attendance is key to increasing students attending school and ultimately improving their academic success.

**2018-2022 School Connectedness and Engagement Achievements in SUSD**

- Created parent liaison positions to support parents of English Learners, Foster & Homeless Youth, and students experiencing attendance challenges
- Created the Positive Pupil Support Team (PPST) to address student classroom behaviors and provide students with skills of self-regulation, problem solving for their individual emotions, etc.
- Standardized District approach to reports of bullying on campus by fully implementing our bullying investigation procedure. This includes having school staff work with students and families in restorative practices to ensure these situations do not continue or escalate.
- Implemented Parent Square system to make school communication more efficient, more connected, and more responsive to student, school, and home needs
- Establish systems and positions to appropriately support and monitor the SEL needs and/or behavior needs of students and staff (i.e. hired an SST Coordinator with a LCSW background, began regular monitoring of student attendance and implementation of PBIS and SEL strategies, revised mental health support through school social worker team, etc.)

- Hosted LCAP community stakeholder meeting that included site leaders (teachers, admin, classified, and parents), district leaders (DO admin, TOSAS, Cabinet members) and Board representatives to revise the LCAP goals, actions, and services for the 2020-2023 LCAP period.
- Established regular communications and parent/community partner meeting practices for district events (i.e., used of Parent Square posts, forms, and surveys for updates regarding emergencies, Coffee with Superintendent meetings for SEL & Safety response, Social Studies curriculum, Construction & Facilities needs, etc.) and used social media accounts and Parent Square to provide regular communication with parents and community partners on a variety of topics. Monitored and structured update procedures for District FB page (i.e. site schedule for posts, misc. post topics, etc.).
- Re-established on-campus connections with PTA/PTO/PTC groups following COVID closures to enhance parent partnerships and re-establish parent school connections now that schools can be open (i.e. PTA tea). Refined relationship with SCV PTA leadership to ensure support for school groups who needed assistance and to ensure better collaboration on future projects.
- Established process to allow both in-person participation, on-line participation, and recorded viewing of Governing Board meetings to ensure community members have transparency in governance and can participate from multiple settings.
- Facilitated school reopening events (i.e. Open Houses, Spring Carnivals, Ribbon Cuttings) to ensure connection with community and sponsor positive relationships between schools and community
- Establish equity training through “the Coalition of the Willing” to allow adult centered discussions around bias, racism, stereotypes, privilege, etc. This training is designed to support individuals reflecting on their values, beliefs, and practices related to diversity so they may be better equipped to provide/create an inclusive school community.
- Purchase inclusive literature books for each of the 15 libraries. These books reflect a variety of cultures and traditionally underrepresented groups. The goal is to provide examples of individuals so students “see themselves” within the school setting.
- Provided training for teachers in grades 4-6 to address sensitive content around enslaved peoples, indigenous peoples, and world religions. Designed to allow teachers to better understand this content and the background information related to what the standards require so they may feel better prepared to discuss these topics appropriately with students.
- Established relationship with Tataviam leadership to ensure better understanding of standards related to local Indigenous people, develop better understanding of their culture to ensure culturally appropriate instruction, and create partnership with community leaders.
- Established the Parent and Educator Advisory Coalition for Equity (PEACE) to allow for parental in-put on District response to equity within our school community.

#### **2018-2022 Awards and Recognition Received by SUSD for School Connectedness and Engagement**

- Received Kaiser Grants for Wellness in 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Three-year Total \$65,000)
- SCV PTA Council Honorary Service Award to Dr. Hawkins in 2020-2021 for COVID response
- Dr. Hawkins selected as LA County Office of Education (LACOE) committee representative for the Rising to the Challenge of COVID 19 Framework document creation
- All district sites received Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) recognition award at the silver or gold level in spring of 2022
- 2022 - Six sites received recognition as America’s Healthiest schools from Healthier Generation (409 nationwide). The sites include Helmers, North Park, Santa Clarita, Rosedell, West Creek, and Cedar creek. Both West Creek and Cedar creek received one of the 11 national recognitions for the All-Star award (all 9 areas recognized).
- 2022 – SCV Signal recognition for Dr. Hawkins as part of its 51 Most Influential People in the Santa Clarita Valley