

June 6, 2018

Dear Families and Colleagues,

Every school year has its own rhythm – the highlights, the low points, and the themes that come up again and again over the course of nine months. I'd like to take this last letter of the 2017-18 school year to summarize what has been wonderful, what has been challenging, and what we will continue to do work on as move on to summer and then our next school year.

First, I'd like to congratulate both our graduating seniors and our many students who are promoting from one grade level (be it preschool, elementary school, or middle school) to the next. These passages can be exciting, scary, exhilarating, and a little sad. I send my very best to all of our students and families in this week of great transitions. (You can see news about the Class of 2018 [here](#).)

Second, there are so many great things happening at all our schools that it is difficult to describe it all. But let me start by reminding our community that several of our schools won big awards this year. [Lincoln Middle School and ASTI, for instance, won Green Ribbon Awards](#) in recognition of their programs supporting environmental literacy. That brings our total number of green schools in the district to three (Bay Farm School was our first.) These environmental programs are near and dear to my heart, and I thank students and staff for their work both qualifying and applying for these designations. The standard is quite high, and we hope all our schools continue in their Go Green efforts.

This year, [three AUSD schools were also named to a statewide Honor Roll](#), which is maintained by the Educational Results Partnership and the Campaign for Business and Education Excellence. Those three schools are ASTI, Lincoln Middle School, and Wood Middle School. I am so proud of the work that our schools have done to achieve these honors. We are also proud that [Bay Farm School and Earhart Elementary were named California Distinguished Schools](#) this year. Again it is difficult to honor and recognize all the great things happening in AUSD schools. We are proud of all of them.

Anti-Bias and School Safety Progress

Of course there were challenges, too, and one of the major challenges here this past year was an uptick in the reports of hate speech incidents. This uptick mirrors Bay Area and national trends. And while both the national and local increases are disturbing, I am gratified to report that we have taken a number of steps to make AUSD a more accepting and inclusive community. Those steps

include working with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) on anti-bias training, setting up a new Jewish Education Round Table and new Asian Pacific American Round Table, and passing resolutions that recognize May as Jewish American Heritage Month and Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

A number of our schools have also set up committees devoted to inclusion and equity, and three (Alameda High, Otis Elementary, and ASTI) achieved “No Place for Hate” status from the ADL this spring. This is challenging and humbling work, and we look forward to further partnering with Facing History and Ourselves next year to provide further anti-bias training for our staff.

Across the country, school shootings have been a horrific theme this year. We are proud of the leadership taken by our students, who organized walkouts, voter registration drives, rallies, vigils, forums, and letter writing campaigns in response to the tragic shootings in Florida, Texas, and other states. These students are helping to bring about the change that so many of us want to see in the world, and we are deeply inspired by and grateful for their passion, leadership, and courage in the face of these heartbreaking incidents.

From an administrative side, please know that we are continuing to work on Measure I projects that make our schools physically safer – including with fences, state-of-the-art locks, and reconfigured entry areas to make it easier to monitor visitors. We also continue to partner with local agencies on developing and practicing response protocols for possible incidents in our own schools. And we are striving to create schools that are more emotionally safe – including by assessing and supporting our students’ mental health, implementing more intervention services for them, and working to build healthier school climates across the district.

Budget Changes and Funding Advocacy

Funding was also a theme this year. This winter, the Board of Education directed staff to review budget priorities in light of the fact that despite recent raises AUSD employees are still among the lowest paid public school district employees in the county. The district initiated a series of community meetings and communications to discuss ways of finding revenue to improve AUSD salaries. In April, [the Board approved \\$2.7 million in cuts](#) to programs in order to improve employee salaries. So far, the Alameda Education Association has not accepted our offer based on these proposed raises, but we sincerely hope to work and come to agreement with the teachers union in the coming months.

As I hope all in our community know, funding is not just an issue for AUSD. We have been working with districts across the country and California to pressure the state government to provide more funding for public education so that we can afford to improve salaries and expand educational programs. This spring, for instance, the Board of Education passed resolutions supporting: AB 2808 (which would increase funding to public education to the national average); AB 2954 (which would allow school districts to structure parcel taxes more flexibly); and the California Schools and Local Communities Funding Act (which seeks to close some loopholes in Proposition 13 so as to generate more public funding for schools and other purposes). Two weeks ago, I also joined superintendents from across the county in writing [a letter](#) urging the next governor of the state to match public education funding to the state's considerable economic power.

This legislative advocacy and collective action are crucial to improving public education in this state, because AUSD is not experiencing budget problems in a vacuum. Instead, our budget problems are part of a systemic underfunding of public schools that is causing financial problems for districts all up and down the state. Only by working together can we enact change. We thank those who join us in our rallying cry for fair and full funding for AUSD and all California schools.

All of this work requires long-term planning, which is hard for families, I know, because your students are in our public schools now. But as you recharge over the summer and enjoy your time with your children, I hope you will keep an eye out for ways to join a growing movement to improve our public school funding and programs. California is a magnificent state; our students deserve a magnificent education.

While we take pride in all the great things happening in our schools, we also know we need to continue wrestling with issues so we can continuously improve. We thank our families, staff, and partnering stakeholders for sustaining dialogue and making collaborative efforts so we continue our progress.

Sincerely,

Sean McPhetridge, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools