It has been my honor to serve Sonoma County as your elected Superintendent of Schools since 2010. While each school district is governed by its own school board and led by its own superintendent, I feel privileged to support our county’s 40 school districts and 183 schools through leadership, professional development, and state-designated fiscal and program oversight.

I see my role as guiding our county’s educational initiatives in a forward-moving direction, so that Sonoma County schools can be leaders in preparing students for an ever-changing world.

My efforts have focused on service to students, districts, and the community. I have chosen to focus on four initiatives that I believe will enable our students to be engaged, productive, and healthy members of our community after they leave Sonoma County schools. These are:

—A well-educated, career-ready workforce
—A vital, healthy, and engaged student community
—Educational programs that support early literacy for all students
—A countywide cadre of teaching professionals using 21st century teaching methods to fully engage young people in learning

In this annual Spotlight on Sonoma County Schools publication, we celebrate examples of these ideas in action in local schools. Read on to see how students are gaining literacy with the help of Legos; preparing for their futures in state-of-the-art College and Career Centers; learning to maintain their emotional and physical health through gardening and dance; and becoming invested in their education through project-based learning.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about the exciting things happening in Sonoma County schools.

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Spotlight is an annual publication highlighting local schools, produced by the Sonoma County Office of Education. Questions? Email jhansen@scoe.org.

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SONOMA COUNTY SCHOOLS: BY THE NUMBERS

70,940 Students Enrolled

40 School Districts

183 Public Schools (57 Charter)

Graduation Rate Improving:
74.7% in 2010
84.4% in 2017

College Readiness Improving (defined as students meeting UC/CSU entrance requirements):
27% in 2010
36% in 2017

The mission of the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) is to foster student success through service to students, schools, and the community.

SCOE is a public education partner to the county’s 40 school districts serving K-12 students. While each district is autonomous and governed by its own board of trustees, SCOE offers school districts critical leadership and support in these priority areas:

- California State Standards
- College and Career Readiness
- School Success for English Learners
- Assessment and Accountability for Students and Teachers
- Activities and Events that Serve Youth and Community

SCOE programs include:

- Classroom instruction for approximately 400 special education students
- Instructional support services for about 400 students who are deaf/hard of hearing or visually impaired
- Alternative schools for about 150 at-risk youth
- Instruction to about 70 students in juvenile hall
- Case management for about 100 students in licensed children institutions who attend non-public schools
- Professional development for more than 5,000 county educators
- Processing over $900 million in financial transactions for 40 districts

For additional education-related facts: scoe.org/edfacts
For a complete list of individual districts: scoe.org/schooldirectory
A Well-Educated, Career-Ready Workforce

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES

More and more, schools are embracing the idea that they must prepare students to succeed at college AND in their future careers. This philosophy is embodied by Santa Rosa City Schools (SRCS), which has opened College and Career Centers at all of its high schools.

These modern-feeling spaces use data-driven strategies and trained counselors to reach and serve all students. They came about because of overwhelming requests from families, gathered as the district built its Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Students had a lot of say in the look and feel of the centers too—the district gathered input on furniture and other items through outreach to student groups.

“The College and Career Centers were designed to be a welcoming and engaging space for students and families.”

- Debi Batini
Director of Career Technical Education/
College and Career Readiness

At lunch or breaks, students can be seen catching up on homework, doing college essays, working on filing financial aid applications, and meeting with counselors.

The district works closely with postsecondary and community partners to enhance the services and resources provided to students through the center. This includes field trips to local college campuses and presentations by technical schools, two- and four-year colleges, and organizations like the Peace Corps. Last year, the district partnered with a nonprofit organization called 10,000 Degrees to hold a financial aid campaign that encouraged students to file for federal aid. The result was a 19 percent increase in the FAFSA and California Dream Act completion rate. As well, all centers offer families a robust online tool called Naviance, which helps students with college and career preparation.

Jerilea Jones, who runs the College and Career Center at Santa Rosa High School, says she and the rest of the SRHS School Counselor team are thrilled that the center has quickly become embedded in the culture of the school since opening in the fall of 2015. SRHS Principal Brad Coscarelli says, “It’s starting to become the hub we want it to be.”

A BRIDGE TO SANTA ROSA JUNIOR COLLEGE

Casa Grande High School’s “Jump Start to the JC” program was born from the observation that seniors who were planning to attend Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC)—more than half of each graduating class—were missing out on the college application season and all the support and planning that process offers. Casa believes JC-bound students should be on the same application cycle and receiving the same support as those bound for four-year institutions. Since the Jump Start program began in 2014, the commonly heard student statement “I’m just going to the JC” has been replaced by “I’m going to college at the JC.”

Jump Start begins each year with a big kick-off lunch meeting, where kids learn about the SRJC application process. They learn they will get help from Casa teachers and counselors, as well as SRJC staff who assist with admissions applications and financial aid. They get a detailed application timeline, compiled by Casa staff members coordinating with SRJC. They’re guided to take Counseling 270, a prerequisite course for JC enrollment that introduces them to college.

The program has quickly grown since it was created. Under the Jump Start program in 2016-17, 91 students took Counseling 270. That’s about 52 percent of Casa’s SRJC-bound students, up from just 15 percent in the first year of the program. The program serves a high number of English language learner, socio-economically disadvantaged, and first-generation college-going students, making this a program that truly helps all students succeed regardless of background.

Sharon Howell, Assistant Principal at Casa, said the idea is to help students plan ahead and develop goals such as earning a certificate, completing a major, or preparing to transfer to a four-year college. These goals help them persist and succeed at SRJC.
HEALTHY MINDS: THE FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING

Efforts are taking off throughout Sonoma County to promote among youth social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care. An important part of the work addresses adverse childhood experiences in light of a troubling fact: Nearly one in five kids in the county have suffered two or more traumatic experiences, which can severely affect their physical and mental health and ability to learn.

One approach to trauma-informed instruction is currently being piloted in grades kindergarten through third at Sonoma Charter School (SCS) in Sonoma Valley Unified School District. Known as Rainbowdance, this program engages students in communicating through integrated song and movement. It immerses young children in their present experience so they aren’t anticipating what’s going to happen next or dwelling on the past. Dicki Macy of the Boston Children’s Foundation, who created the program and brought it to SCS in October 2016, says, “The integration of song with movement and gesture encourages children to enjoy the present and to mobilize without fear. This engagement promotes the establishment of trust and safety.”

Adults facilitate the routine, using music to guide students’ motions. The children move around, using props like silk scarves to help them embody a story. A parachute on the floor represents both a starting and ending point to establish focus and structure. The patterns build and reinforce stability and security, and students begin to internalize boundaries, self-regulate, take risks, and build relationships. Self-regulation is important because it teaches kids to control their emotions and respond to situations appropriately.

Rainbowdance is just one part of SCS’s multi-faceted plan to provide trauma-informed and resiliency-focused approaches to student learning.

SCS is partnering with the Hanna Boys Center and its recently launched Training Institute to expand this work. Assistant Director of the Hanna Institute Nick Dalton is involved in all aspects of the work, from guiding Rainbowdance sessions to working with older kids. Mr. Dalton says the goal is to build a holistic model that can spread to all schools in Sonoma Valley in order to serve kids from a range of backgrounds.

GROWING HEALTHY STUDENTS

As initiatives are cropping up across the county that support healthy minds, Park Side School in the Sebastopol Union School District has begun a program that promotes healthy bodies. Park Side’s fruit and vegetable garden is an active and vital part of the school program, where students learn about sustainability while appreciating fresh produce they grew themselves.

In 2013-14, school leaders decided it was time to revitalize their existing garden. A newly formed garden committee took the lead in getting the project off the ground. They developed a plan to rebuild the garden boxes, repair the planting shed, install a seating area, and plant annual and perennial food crops. Local organizations like Whole Foods, Lowes, Sebastopol Hardware, Harmony Nursery, and the California Educational Endowment helped finance the project.

Enthusiasm for the garden quickly took off among staff and students, and it is now a part of Park Side’s science and nutrition curricula. In addition to fruits and vegetables, the garden includes flowers and composting and seedling starters. The school uses the garden as a “learning laboratory” with a part time garden coordinator. All Park Side classes visit the garden weekly and participate in activities that go beyond gardening, including cooking, art, and seed cultivation.
Is sitting still at a desk the best way for young students to learn? That’s what a class at John B. Riebli Elementary School in the Mark West Union School District recently set out to discover. It was a strategic class project designed to engage students in their work, led by teacher Andrea Farrell. And it’s just one example of how Sonoma County schools are at the forefront of efforts to modernize the classroom so that students stay engaged.

During the project, students surveyed adults to see how they work best and wrote letters to school leaders seeking approval to pilot a “flexible classroom seating program.” If all went well, the school would consider adopting the changes more broadly.

The district has embraced project-based learning, where students learn math, English, social studies, and science through a hands-on project with a tangible connection to the outside world. Projects are guided by students’ interests, which increases investment in the work. In the flexible seating pilot, students employed English language arts through writing and research, used math to calculate costs, and learned about social science through their outreach to school leadership and the community.

The result? A re-designed classroom dominated by a big couch that students lounged on, writing boards propped on their laps. Some sat behind desks—but kicked their feet back and forth against rubber foot rests. Others moved back and forth on bouncy chairs. One student, Andrew, said, “Most kids like kicking stuff under their desk, and that makes messes and distracts others. All you have to do is bounce in your chair and it takes your mind off kicking.”

The district last year appointed a full-time project-based learning teacher/coach who helps teachers integrate projects into curriculum. The coach, Lisa Warne, encourages teachers to give students more choice and say in the learning process. “Students are very engaged and motivated,” she said. “There’s lots of beautiful, productive noise in classrooms.”

A LIBRARY FOR THE FUTURE

Just as classrooms are changing, so are libraries. Last school year, when Windsor Unified School District provided its schools with money to update their libraries, Windsor Creek Elementary seized the opportunity to re-make its traditional library into an interactive space where Legos, building blocks, art materials, puzzles, rock collections, computers, and more help bring books alive. It’s gone from being a strictly academic realm to one where students can’t wait to come to spend their lunch break learning and exploring.

While this library is bursting with interactive games and projects, the activities are all designed to drive student interest back to books. For instance, a school-wide collaborative mosaic art project was kicked off with a reading of the classic book *Stone Soup*, which is all about teamwork. Fossils and gemstone kits have been a hit, and they’re stored right next to bins of books on the same topics.

“Not every kid learns the same way or naturally loves books. I want this to be a place where every kid wants to come, I want it to be seen as cool,” said Principal Julie Stearn of what motivated the change. Librarian Beth Smith added, “We need the library to come alive.”
LITERACY THROUGH LEGOS

Legos are a perennial favorite among children of all ages—and educators have tapped into that appeal to boost learning—even literacy. These colorful toys are rapidly appearing in school subjects ranging from language arts to social studies to science. Recently, Grant Elementary School in the Petaluma City School District set a goal of bringing hands-on learning into its curriculum, and Legos seemed like a great vehicle for doing so. Principal Emily Todd sent three teachers to SCOE’s Lego Symposium in 2016, where they gained firsthand experience and access to materials for using Legos to teach. The three teachers returned and trained all K-3 teachers at the school to begin incorporating Legos into their lessons.

“For some kids, writing doesn’t come easy or natural. If you put Legos in front of them and have them write about what they created, they find a new love for writing.”

- Amanda Beavers
  First Grade Teacher
  Grant Elementary School

At Grant, teachers are reporting tremendous student enthusiasm to this invitation to be creative. For a literacy exercise in Amanda Beavers’s first-grade class, students were asked to imagine an invention that would make something at home easier to do, then build it using Legos, record it on iPads, and use the video to include details into a writing assignment about the project. “For some kids, writing doesn’t come easy or natural,” said Ms. Beavers. “If you put Legos in front of them and have them write about what they created, they find a new love for writing.”

For a science project, the second graders in Pamela Cratty’s class built model aquariums for steelhead fish using Legos. Then they used tablets and booklets to label the components required for the fish to survive in the habitats they had created. To build their aquariums, students split into groups, collaborating with one another and using their imaginations to complete their projects. “Legos are a favorite—let me tell you!” Ms. Cratty commented amid groups of students working eagerly on their creations.

Similarly, a third-grade class taught by Patti Kowta worked on a Lego car challenge. Students experimented building cars with Legos, then took pictures of what they built and wrote about the process. Ms. Kowta also encouraged students to ask questions such as, “What can I change?” and “How can I rebuild this?”

PERSONALIZED PATHS TO LITERACY

Not all students learn the same way just because they are in the same class. With this in mind, Dunbar Elementary School in Sonoma Valley Unified School District is piloting is an exciting model designed to personalize learning. The goal is to ensure that all students master grade level proficiency standards in reading and math by the end of third grade.

Known as Grade Level Proficiency Project (GLPP), the program provides students with tools geared to meet their individual needs.

This accommodates different learning styles, and students receive targeted support to become (and stay) proficient in language arts and math. The pilot serves kindergarteners through third graders, with services differing from grade to grade. Students complete adapted, individualized lessons on iPads or Chromebooks and set up work spaces using carrels. They use cards to signal for help and questions. Instructional assistants support guided practice with mini lessons and certificates of completion that celebrate a student’s movement from one level to the next. The teachers act as guides, monitoring student data to inform instruction and create groups for instruction on targeted learning skills.

The program enhances and deepens state education standards, Dunbar educators are finding. One second/third grade teacher named Karen O’Hara says, “While working on math, reading, or spelling, I know all students’ needs are being met... Students are engaged and working at their level. It’s a teacher’s dream.”
BACK-TO-SCHOOL RESOURCES

KINDERGARTEN READINESS CHECKLIST

Are you the parent of a young child entering kindergarten? Top skills your child should have by the time he or she reaches school age include:

- Use the toilet, wash hands, dress, eat, and blow nose independently
- Stay focused and pay attention for moderate periods of time
- Ask for help when needed
- Hold a pencil, use a crayon, and cut with scissors
- Carry, unzip, and place items in and out of a backpack
- Open and close lunch containers and eat lunch independently

Visit scoe.org/kinder-ready for more information.

LITERACY CORNER

Studies show that students lose a grade level of reading over the summer. Get ready for the school year with these family literacy tips:

- When your child sees you reading, he learns that reading matters. Read in front of your child as often as you can.
- Set special time aside for reading with your child every day, or as often as you can.
- When looking at books with your child, get her talking about what you see and read.
- Make weekly trips to the library to check out books. Select books that interest your child—let her take the lead in choosing what to read.
- Always keep books with you and put them in places your child will be—in the car, kitchen, and bathroom. If books are near toys, they’re more likely to be picked up.
- Play word and listening games together. You can play alphabet games, sing songs, and use blocks and puzzles to help teach letters to your child.
- Choose a place with few interruptions if you can. Limit TV and other electronics so that there is plenty of time for reading.
- Have a fun! Use silly expressions and voices to make reading an exciting experience for your child.

For more tips and a full guide to reading with your little one, visit scoe.org/literacy.

IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

Per California law, children cannot attend school until they have up-to-date immunizations. Your healthcare provider can assist you with updating your child’s vaccines. If your child is not immunized with one or more of the required immunizations due to a medical reason, you will need to submit to your school a Permanent or Temporary Medical Exemption signed by a Medical Doctor (MD) or a Doctor of Osteopathy (DO). Students need two rounds of vaccinations; one round when entering kindergarten, and the other for entering seventh grade.

Kindergarten Requirements
- Diphtheria, Pertussis, and Tetanus (DPT)
- Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR)
- Polio
- Hepatitis B
- Varicella (Chickenpox)

Oral Health Assessment Required
- Your child should have an oral health assessment no later than May 31 of his/her first year in school. The assessment should be provided by a dentist or licensed dental health professional.

Looking Ahead: Health Checkup Required for First Grade
- A certificate verifying that your child has received a health checkup within the last 18 months is required within 90 days of entering first grade.

Seventh-Grade Requirements
- Diphtheria, Pertussis, and Tetanus (DPT)
- Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR)
- Polio
- Hepatitis B
- Varicella (Chickenpox)
- Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis (Tdap)

If you do not have a doctor or have questions about immunizations in general, contact the Sonoma County Immunization Coordinator at (707) 565-4573. For information on the web, visit shotsforschool.org.

Access school calendars, graduation dates, student events, and more back-to-school resources online at scoe.org/backtoschool.