Looking Toward Change

Sonoma County schools are moving forward. The years of state budget cuts to education are now behind us. Our community helped pass Proposition 30 to bring additional funding into our schools and we are looking ahead with a renewed sense of purpose. Our goal is to provide education that prepares Sonoma County students for future success.

The year ahead promises to be an interesting, exciting time for public schools. New standards coupled with greater understanding of what students need to learn in order to be “college and career ready” are changing classroom instruction and challenging students to learn in different ways.

Just as technology and the ability to connect 24/7 have impacted our personal lives, teaching and learning are taking on new dimensions as we bring the latest 21st century tools into our schools. We have moved from 19th century slate boards to 20th century three-ring binders to the new electronic tablets of the current day.

This public service publication shines the spotlight on recent innovations in education and how Sonoma County classrooms are changing. There are excellent teachers, dedicated classified staff, outstanding students, and award-winning programs in our schools today and I am honored to bring them to your attention.

Steven D. Herrington, Ph.D.
Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools

21st Century Tools
HEALDSBURG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

As part of this school’s K-2 iPad Pilot Project, even the youngest students are engaged in using technology to learn. Second-language learners benefit with the addition of earphones. Pictured: Anthony Lucas, John Sweeney.

SONOMA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

North County
26 schools • 9,507 students
Alexander Valley Union
Cloverdale Unified
Geyserville Unified
Healdsburg Unified
Horicon
Kashia
West Side Union
Windsor Unified

Santa Rosa Area
62 schools • 29,700 students
Bellevue Union
Bennett Valley Union
Kenwood
Mark West Union
Piner-Olivet Union
Rincon Valley Union
Roseland
Santa Rosa City Elementary
Santa Rosa High
Wright

South County
57 schools • 22,938 students
Cinnabar
Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified
Dunham
Liberty
Old Adobe Union
Petaluma City Elementary
Petaluma Joint Union High
Sonoma Valley Unified
Two Rock Union
Waugh
Wilmar Union

West County
27 schools • 7,498 students
Forestville Union
Fort Ross
Gravenstein Union
Guerneville
Harmony Union
Monte Rio Union
Montgomery
Oak Grove Union
Sebastopol Union
Twin Hills Union
West Sonoma County Union High
Shift to New Standards

As the 2013-14 school year opens, the transition to Common Core Standards is at the top of the education agenda. Many Sonoma County schools have begun to align classrooms to these new national standards, while others are in the process of preparing teachers to make the shift. California schools must fully implement the Common Core Standards by 2014-15 and they are receiving special state funding to support this change.

The standards present new ideas about what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Teachers, parents, and education experts developed the standards by carefully analyzing the skills, knowledge, and abilities high school graduates need for success in college and careers. Working backwards from there, specific learning goals for each grade were defined.

Parents and students will notice changes as the Common Core Standards are put in place. For example, students will be challenged to read more difficult material. Books commonly read at one grade level may now be assigned at a lower grade.

The focus of reading assignments will also be different. As students advance through the grades, reading for information will take on more importance and there will be less emphasis on narrative stories. Why? Because careful reading of informational texts is a skill that students need in college and career.

Writing assignments will make a similar shift: less narrative writing and more writing to analyze, present a view, or argue a point. This kind of writing, and the careful reading that goes with it, will be taught not only during English classes, but also in science, history, and other subject areas.

In math, the standards focus more attention on mathematical thinking and less on computation. Students will continue to add, subtract, multiply, and divide; but these computing skills have become less critical in a world filled with technology.

What’s more important is that students learn to reason mathematically, explain their thinking, and know how to solve real-life problems. Mathematical practices—making sense of problems, reasoning abstractly, and presenting logical arguments—will figure prominently in these next-generation math classes.

Math at the middle and high school levels may see the biggest changes. Schools will have the option of integrating math subjects, like algebra and geometry, across the grades or teaching them in separate classes. Algebra will no longer be an eighth-grade requirement, but students will be learning algebraic thinking throughout the grades, even at the elementary level.

With the new standards, some students may find school “harder,” but they will be better prepared for the future. Essential skills, like critical thinking, will be reinforced in every subject area and concepts will build through the grade levels. All instruction will share a common overarching goal: ensuring that students are on a path to be college and career ready at graduation.

The new standards put students on a path to be college and career ready when they graduate

Common Core Math
FLOWERY SCHOOL

Alexia Contreras and Shauna Johnston are part of a group of fifth-graders searching for solutions during a math lesson involving geometric shapes. Like other teachers, Krista McAtee (left) is working to align her lessons to the Common Core Standards.

Photos: Tamara Bell, Photography (left) Scott Manchester (right)
New Ways of Teaching & Learning

Many schools are now teaching the 4Cs—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—in addition to the traditional subjects known as the 3Rs. The 4Cs are considered essential skills in our increasingly complex life and work environments, which is why they are now becoming a focus of instruction.

The 4Cs are part of what Sonoma County schools are calling “21st century teaching and learning.” This is an initiative that works in concert with the new standards to prepare students for the challenges of the modern world.

In addition to emphasizing the 4Cs, 21st century education calls for schools to ensure that students know how to use the latest technology tools to access and make sense of the wide range of information now at their fingertips. This idea is opening the classroom door to new technologies, along with lessons and assignments that look very different from those of the past.

You can see this happening across Sonoma County—and you can expect to see it more and more. Students are using tablets and smartphones in class to collaborate on assignments and conduct Internet research. They are writing for class blogs, making videos, crafting multimedia presentations, and completing paperless writing assignments. Some teachers are posting online lectures for students to view at home, then using class time for interactive learning and problem solving. This is just one way today’s teachers are combining face-to-face instruction with online learning activities, a strategy known as “blended learning.”

These and other teaching innovations capitalize on students’ inherent interest in technology. But more important, using today’s technology tools for educational purposes builds the information literacy and technology skills students will need in the future. After all, what career doesn’t involve technology?

But it’s not just the influx of technology that characterizes today’s classrooms. Students are often working in groups to solve problems and complete assignments. As they collaborate, it’s not just about finding the right answer. They may be asked to solve a problem, then solve it again in a different way. This builds critical thinking skills.

In many classrooms, teachers are also using a dynamic approach to teaching known as project-based learning. Project-based learning engages students in exploring real-world problems and challenges. It is a style of hands-on learning that inspires students to delve deep into academic content, think critically about it, explore creative solutions, and process what they’ve learned. By structuring learning in this way, teachers are making school more like real life and they are equipping students to meet the challenges ahead.
In January, the Board of Supervisors made an investment in public schools, establishing a scholarship fund for first generation college-bound students and approving funding to support additional career-focused Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs in local high schools. These initiatives will help our county “grow its own” talent pool of young people who are prepared to do the jobs that are critical to Sonoma County’s ongoing economic development.

There are a variety of ways that schools are helping students develop the skills and knowledge that local employers need. Of course, core academic classes are part of this effort, but so is “learning by doing.”

Learning by doing is a hallmark of the Maker Movement, which pioneered a modern do-it-yourself approach to making things using both traditional and digital tools. Today, Project Make classes are sprouting up in schools across Sonoma County, primarily at the high school level.

In these classes, students come up with ideas about what they want to make, collaborate with each other to refine or enhance their ideas, then apply their knowledge and trial-and-error ingenuity to engineer products using a variety of tools and resources. The result can range from shoes with built-in GPS to a quadricycle constructed from PVC pipe.

Through the making process, students can see how concepts they’ve learned in math and science classes take shape in the real world. They expand their understanding when a project doesn’t perform as expected and they must adjust their project—and their thinking. This builds students’ STEM skills in a very hands-on way.

Another learning-by-doing example takes a more traditional approach. Students in several high schools are building houses using plans from the Tiny Tumbleweed House Company. Construction classes have been popular in schools for some time, but the opportunity to build a complete house is something new. Working on this 89-square-foot house with a loft bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom gives students a taste of the full range of skills required in home construction. The chance to build something real engages students in a way that previous construction classes have not.

“Linked learning” is another strategy that some schools are using to connect students to future employment options. These programs create cross-curricular linkages between core academic classes and career-focused training, with learning taking place both at school and in work environments. Structured into pathways centered on broad industry sectors, linked learning prepares students for college and career—not just one or the other.

Relating academic instruction to career applications makes school more relevant for students. This ignites student interest, promotes more in-depth learning, and yields greater student success. When learning is also connected to local workforce development priorities, it is a win-win situation for both students and the community.
Global Citizenship

Among the handful of new schools opening in Sonoma County recently are three dual immersion schools. These new schools join several other dual immersion campuses that have operated in Sonoma County for many years. Together, they represent one way that local schools are preparing students to become global citizens.

Dual immersion programs, also known as two-way immersion, offer the opportunity for students to become bilingual in English and another language. Beginning in the early elementary years, these programs serve both English-speaking and non-English-speaking students. The goal is for both groups of students to achieve proficiency in rigorous academic content and two languages as they advance through the grades.

Students learn a second language through regular subject matter instruction rather than in separate language classes. Although they vary, most dual immersion programs provide about 90 percent of kindergarten and first-grade instruction in the target language (Spanish or French) and 10 percent in English. Because early literacy and math skills are similar in both languages, instruction adheres to the same academic standards as in other schools.

Instruction gradually transitions to a 50-50 split by the later elementary grades, with each language used at designated times. Since all students in dual immersion schools are second-language learners, they serve as role models for each other and peer-to-peer learning is encouraged.

For students who are native English speakers, dual immersion provides an enhancement to traditional schooling by engaging them in language learning at a time in their development when they are most receptive to it. Students whose primary language is not English have the opportunity to advance academically in their home language as they gradually take on the challenge of learning English.

For all dual immersion students, strong early literacy skills are important to long-term success. Both groups of students move along a path toward near-native fluency in two languages—speaking, reading, writing, and learning in both languages. Becoming bilingual is an asset for students, as is the cross-cultural understanding and respect that dual immersion programs engender. Our interconnected world now requires individuals of diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles to interact on a local and global scale, and dual immersion schools are helping to advance this idea.

Encouraging student understanding of other cultures and awareness of global issues is another goal of 21st century classrooms, in both traditional and dual language schools. As students are engaged in thinking about the world and the larger community, they are acquiring skills that enhance their role as responsible global citizens.

Our interconnected world requires diverse individuals to interact on a local and global scale.

Dual Immersion
LOMA VISTA IMMERSION ACADEMY

In Petaluma’s Old Adobe district, Alfonso Torres and Caleb Weaver work side-by-side, serving as role models for one another as they each learn a second language. The district opened Loma Vista Immersion Academy this year, strengthening its commitment to bilingual, intercultural learning for success in a global society.

CALI CALMÉCAC LANGUAGE ACADEMY

Language is one focus in this second-grade classroom, but students are also acquiring essential early literacy and math skills. Here, teacher Liduvina Myres reads with Gizelle Delgado.
Honor Roll

Second-grade teacher Pattie Dawson was named Sonoma County’s Teacher of the Year for 2013. A 15-year teaching veteran, she has educated students at Bellevue School throughout her tenure. She has been a leader in her district, consistently working to expand her own expertise and collaborating with others to improve instruction. Highly respected by colleagues and parents, she uses a variety of teaching strategies to scaffold learning so that every student can meet expectations. Creative, stimulating, and interactive learning takes place in her classroom every school day.

Rae Galeazzi
LAWRENCE JONES MIDDLE SCHOOL

With 31 years in education, teacher Rae Galeazzi is known for creating exceptional learning environments that connect middle school students to what they need to learn.

‘Teacher of the Year’ Pattie Dawson teaches second grade at Bellevue School

Rae Galeazzi, an English teacher at Lawrence Jones Middle School, earned recognition as the Middle School Educator of the Year for the North Coast. She is a popular teacher who understands the unique needs of middle school students and is able to design instruction that connects them to academic content. She co-created an award-winning writing program, Write to the Point, that resulted in higher student achievement and she is an expert at differentiating instruction for students with special needs.

Brian Deller, science department chair at Elsie Allen High School, is the 2013 High School Educator of the Year for the North Coast region. Students in his classes say he is an exciting and challenging teacher, with a sense of humor, who is able to help them understand complex science concepts. He pioneered the use of standards-based grading practices at his school. Following his lead, many other Elsie Allen teachers have now adopted this system, which allows students to relearn, retry, and earn progressively higher grades.

For the second year in a row, a Sonoma County classified school employee has earned state-level recognition. Congratulations to Cheryl Gostisha, food services director at Horicon School in Annapolis. She is the “one-person food service program” for Horicon’s 60 students and one of six Classified School Employees of the Year in California. While her cooking and healthy, cost-effective menu planning have earned her kudos, it is her care and concern for students that set her apart.

SCHOOL RECOGNITION

Five local schools earned California Distinguished School recognition in 2013 for providing high-quality academic programs. Hillcrest Middle, Maria Carrillo High, Orchard View, Technology High, and Twin Hills Middle can now count themselves among our state’s most exemplary and inspiring public schools.

In addition to its Distinguished School recognition, Hillcrest Middle School earned a place among 12 other California schools honored with the new Exemplary Arts Program Award, which pays tribute to high-achieving schools that also demonstrate outstanding commitment to creative arts education.

Santa Rosa’s Ridgway High School was named a 2013 Model Continuation High School by State Superintendent Tom Torlakson. The program identifies and recognizes alternative schools that provide struggling students with high-quality educational opportunities leading to graduation.

The College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) Honor Roll commends districts that expand access to AP courses while also increasing the academic success of the students in those classes. Windsor Unified was on the nationwide list of 539 Honor Roll districts thanks to the success of the AP program at Windsor High School.
Getting Ready for Kindergarten

Getting Ready for Kindergarten is a brochure on kindergarten readiness that highlights children’s early physical, emotional, and social development and the reading, writing, and math skills that prepare them to enter school. It is available in English and Spanish at www.scoe.org/pr.

Immunizations required for kindergarten, seventh grade

Kindergarten: Up-to-date immunization records must be filed at the school when a child is enrolled for kindergarten. The following immunizations are required:

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

Seventh Grade: Students must have a whooping cough booster shot (called Tdap) and show proof of having had two doses of the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) immunization.

If your child is not immunized due to religious, personal, or medical reasons, notify the school office staff. You will need to submit a signed waiver or written physician’s statement.

Middle School to High School Checklist

Middle school is the best time for students to dream about the future and start thinking about the education opportunities that will lead them there. The Middle School to High School Checklist is a free publication designed to help middle school students prepare for success in high school and beyond. It is available in English and Spanish at www.scoe.org/pr.

High School to College Road Map

As students progress through high school, they’re faced with decisions, responsibilities, and deadlines related to finding the right college, technical school, or apprenticeship program. The High School to College Road Map helps students and parents navigate the route to higher education. It provides a suggested timeline for researching schools, taking the SAT or ACT, applying for financial aid, and more. This publication is available in English and Spanish at www.scoe.org/pr.

College & Career-Ready Fair, Sept 10

Juniors, seniors, and their parents are invited to the Sonoma County College & Career-Ready Fair on September 10, 6:00-8:00 p.m., at Windsor High School. Representatives from over 50 community colleges, public and private universities, and technical schools will be available to answer questions and provide information. This event is free and open to families across the county.