



March 4, 2008

from the office of Superintendent Robert Collins

Art Instructional Council Discusses Key Needs and a Plan for the Coming Years



Pam Ryerson, Santana; Molly Welsh, Monte Vista; Mick McMurray, Mt. Miguel; Ellen Parry, El Cajon Valley discuss art plans during February council meeting

A key component of "A Portfolio of Great Schools" will include a plan for the visual and performing arts. As we discussed Monday afternoon with the Visual Arts Instructional Council, we must ensure that everyone in the East County understands the significance of the arts in a quality instructional program. We know that research shows **that the arts contribute to overall student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematics**. We also know that when parents "shop" for schools, they consider the arts a very important aspect of a strong educational program, and it influences their decision as to what school to attend. If we are going to be competitive with charter schools and private schools in San Diego County, then we must have a strong, well-supported arts program.

It's About Being a Part of the Core

My discussions with our visual and performing arts teachers have centered on being a part of the core. All too often, the arts are considered to be "electives," that are nice to have, but always expendable. Over the next several years, I want to help our principals and teachers change that view. Arts are core to a child's education. Every school should have an instrumental, visual, choral, theater arts and dance program.

Arts Committee Developing a Strategic Plan

I had the opportunity to visit with the Visual Arts Instructional Council. The teachers were engaged and enthusiastic about their work and the opportunity to truly improve the arts. We currently have a committee working on a comprehensive plan which will address curriculum/course offerings, a foundational program, instructional material needs, professional development and facilities. I explained to the Council the importance of moving forward as quickly as possible with an idea of needed facilities. We already know most of our high schools lack adequate theaters or performing arts facilities. Our arts classrooms were never included in Proposition H. At the same time, new Career Tech Academies may include arts and media-centered themes.

We also discussed how the plan will drive us to grant funding sources, possibly a new bond and other sources of funds which have been traditionally lacking from the arts. With our outstanding teacher leadership, the next several years should be very exciting for the arts in East County.



Kathy Burton, Director, Stephanie Contos, Counselor, Cathy Zemlich, English teacher, Vincent Legg, Social Science teacher and Sue Halvin Secretary.

Middle College High School: A Model for Student Success

It took a little while to find Middle College High School (MCHS), tucked away in a couple of bungalows in the middle of construction at Grossmont College. For the past seven years the school has been providing a different and successful educational model for students. The school is made up of 66 11th and 12th graders drawn from throughout East County. And like every school that we visit, it has lessons for each of us as we examine all school programs.

The school has a post-secondary plan for each student, resulting in 24 of the 33 graduating seniors going to a four-year college or university.

High expectations are part of the culture of the school, where students are required to take their science and mathematics on the Grossmont College campus. The expectation is that they will be able to meet the rigor of a college-level course.

It is a personalized environment in which the teachers and a counselor have developed supportive relationships with individual students.

While there are a lot of differences between MCHS and a traditional school, many of their practices are replicable. The District's Strategic Plan presented to the Board on February 21st addresses a post-secondary plan for all students, graduation portfolios and a continual monitoring of student plans over a four-year period. In the coming months, we will continue to explore best practices at MCHS and other high schools as we develop a final plan for our District.