

MDUSD MONDAY MEMO

A Weekly Update of District Activities and Education-related Issues

from the Superintendent's Office, Mt. Diablo Unified School District

Tuesday, August 26, 2008

School's Open!

To Employees, Families, and Friends of the Mt. Diablo Unified School District,

Today we officially begin the 2008-09 school year. While our students are arriving for class on schedule, we are still waiting to hear that the state budget for the year has been approved. We are committed to making sure, as always, that students and staff have the resources they need to be successful, but the state budget crisis is impacting our efforts.

Our administrators, teachers, support staff, and parent volunteers have been working very hard to make sure that students walk into clean, attractive, and well-equipped schools. Our annual three-day Leadership Institute on August 11-13, the Elementary Teachers' Kickoff on August 21, the Middle School Conference on August 22, orientations for new teachers and administrators, and staff meetings at school sites have all been lively, interactive gatherings that help set a positive tone as we start the new year. I've enjoyed participating in and observing numerous conversations at these events and hearing people share their knowledge, experience, and excitement about educating our children.

Budget constraints The state budget crisis, however, looms over us. Last spring we were forced to cut more than \$15 million from the District budget for this school year. We are already feeling the impact. We start school with 145 fewer positions than in August 2007. Class sizes are larger and the number of elective classes fewer. Programs and services have been reduced. We have less flexibility in approving student transfers from school to school. A major concern for all of us, we do not have enough money to settle our employee contracts.

Status of Contract Negotiations We have essentially put contract negotiations on hold until the State Legislature approves and the Governor signs a budget for 2008-09. We may meet with the bargaining teams to consider non-compensation items, but must wait to address employee compensation in negotiations until the state budget is approved and/or the District's financial position is improved.

Budget Development Last year concerns were expressed regarding the District's budget, the budget development process, and errors in some budget accounts. We have shifted responsibility for oversight of these functions and instituted better systems of budget review and internal control. Rest assured, this year's District budget is accurate.

As seems to be the case every Fall, we can see many challenges ahead of us for

the 2008-09 school year. I believe Mt. Diablo employees and families are committed to continuous improvement in our District. We will all work hard in the months ahead to address and try to resolve the issues we face. In that way we can insure that students are well served by our schools and programs, prepared for college or a career after high school.

Respectfully
Gary McHenry
Superintendent

In Appreciation . . .

For helping to prepare for the Opening of School in MDUSD, we thank the staff in:

Curriculum and Instruction for providing hundreds of hours of training for teachers, administrators, other education specialists, and support staff

Educational Services for coordinating our annual Leadership Conference for the more than 400 attendees, who included students, parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, and local business leaders

Fiscal Services for producing a balanced budget for the 2008-09 school year, handling the District's financial operations, and beginning the process of closing the books for the 2007-08 school year

Food and Nutrition Services for ordering food and supplies, setting up kitchens, training staff, and preparing nutritious menus for students

Maintenance & Operations for cleaning, repairing, and updating our facilities and grounds

Office and clerical staff at District schools for assisting parents and students register and get the information they need for a new school year

Personnel staff for processing more than 2,318 applications for certificated and classified positions and hiring more than 25 managers and confidential employees, 132 teachers, and 18 clerical, technical, maintenance, custodial and paraprofessional staff

Purchasing for ordering, processing and delivering books and supplies to each school

Research and Evaluation for collecting and organizing data for the 2007-08 Annual Report, which will be published by mid September

Special Education staff for placing more than 4,000 students with disabilities in appropriate programs in our District as well as more than 180 students in non-public schools

Student Services for processing more than 3,000 requests for inter- and intradistrict transfers

Summer school teachers, administrators, and support staff for serving more than 4,000 students enrolled in academic and enrichment programs

Technology and Information for installing the new Student Information System software in our elementary schools, providing training and support for employees, and beginning the process of installing the new software for Special Education programs

Transportation for setting up a multitude of bus routes and providing services to both general and special education students

All of our major divisions-administrative services, educational services and human resources-for working together throughout the summer break to make sure that we are ready for the opening of our schools

Followup on Community Meetings

Last spring we held seven community meetings, one in each high school attendance area except for College Park, which had two. Reports in several *Monday Memos* and now posted on the District web site listed the issues brought up by parents, employees, and community members. Here is a followup on some of the issues:

More academic rigor in classes and more advanced placement classes

- We have provided additional training to teachers and added some new advanced placement classes for 2008-09.

Assurance that all students will have the support they need to succeed in moving from elementary to middle to high school

- Schools in each high school feeder pattern have strengthened curriculum articulation from grades K through 12.
- Administrators and teachers have been meeting to develop a curriculum focus area for their feeder pattern. Most have chosen mathematics and/or academic literacy.
- This year more time will be allocated for teachers to meet and talk together about curriculum and instructional strategies to help students. Both at the elementary and middle school level we are planning to develop strategies to make sure all 8th graders are prepared to take Algebra I.
- Each high school feeder pattern will have a district-level support team to assist schools with their improvement plan.

Parent-friendly schools and more timely responses to parents

- There is a districtwide commitment to parent-friendly schools. Improving customer service to parents and community members was a major topic at this year's Leadership Conference. In addition, we have developed clear procedures for responding to parent calls and e-mails within 48 hours.
- Many certificated and classified employees and managers have received training in which improving customer service was a component.

Strategic Planning

- The Board of Education has held two special study sessions to determine if the District will embark on a formal process of strategic planning.

A thriving school culture

- We have discussed this issue with administrators, teachers and support staff. All schools have Site Improvement Plans in which school culture is discussed. Several schools are developing professional learning communities.

Parcel Tax

- For the last three years we have been trying to ascertain community support for a parcel tax. An investment in education through a parcel tax is the only mechanism available to us to generate additional funds to attract and retain teachers and other employees and to maintain programs and enhance services for students. The Board is considering placing a parcel tax initiative on the June 2009 ballot.

In others' words . . . *on new beginnings*

"Whether you and I and a few others will renew the world some day remains to be seen. But within ourselves we must renew it each day." ~ Hermann Hesse

"Hope is a renewable option: If you run out of it at the end of the day, you get to start over in the morning." ~ Barbara Kingsolver

"All beginnings are somewhat strange; but we must have patience, and little by little, we shall find things, which at first were obscure, becoming clearer."
~ Vincent De Paul

**Gary McHenry
Superintendent**

**Mt. Diablo Unified School District
website:www.mdusd.k12.ca.us**

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