



Nov. 14, 2016

SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Co-Interim Superintendent Message: Post-election Thoughts for Our District

The results of last week's election prompted a range of responses. We experienced an election of unprecedented personal attacks among candidates. The highly charged rhetoric left adults, as well as children, wondering where our democracy is headed. We experienced an election with unprecedented youth interest and involvement, much of which continues with student protests across the nation. Democracy, with all its messiness and flaws, was at work. Yet, unlike many places around the world, America is undergoing a mainly peaceful transition from one administration to the next.

Now we face a new week with a new president-elect, newly elected legislators, judges, mayors and other local officials. The question is where do we go from here, and what do we teach our students now?

We believe we teach them that, at times, democracy is messier than other times, but can endure the turbulent times. We believe we teach them that in every contest, sometimes their side wins, and sometimes their side loses, but regardless of the outcome, we respect the humanity of both sides. We also teach them that a democracy is its strongest when it respects all its citizens. It is most in danger when we seek to exclude, rather than include, based on race, religion, income, language, gender or sexual orientation. We can teach our students by example that unkind remarks, bullying, and segregating themselves weakens our democracy and makes us all less safe. Each generation makes our democracy stronger or weaker by individual actions.

As a district, we have an opportunity to reflect on our own practices and policies that demonstrate to our youth whether we really believe in democracy. American philosopher, John Dewey, wrote powerfully about an existential democracy; we give meaning to it in the midst of our daily actions and interactions with other. Nowhere is this principle more evident than in the way we educate all the children in our care.

When we all work together to ensure that every child in this district has a fair and equitable opportunity to learn, we are making our democracy stronger for generations to come. Every child who experiences a truthful encounter with our history as a nation is a person more equipped to learn from our past mistakes, as well as our past glory. A child who has an opportunity to study science and learn to distinguish between fact and opinion, between evidence and myth, is a citizen in training. Every child who experiences the humanizing effects of great literature and the arts is our hope for a more humane world. And, every child who learns how to enter dialogue seeking understanding rather than division among those who are different from them is a guarantee of a greater democracy. When we confront our own beliefs and biases, we are making America stronger than ever. Let us each seize the moment and live democratically in ways our youth can see and emulate. Each of us working within this great district, in our many roles, is shaping the democracy of tomorrow. In times like this, the words of James Baldwin, in an interview with Nikki Giovanni more than 40 years ago, comes to mind: The child is our metaphor for tomorrow.

Your Co-Interim Superintendents, SMMUSD

Dr. Sylvia G. Rousseau
Dr. Christopher King

SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

1651 Sixteenth Street • Santa Monica • California 90404-3891 • (310) 450-8338 • www.smmusd.org

Board of Education: Oscar de la Torre • Dr. José Escarce • Craig Foster • Maria Leon-Vazquez

Laurie Lieberman • Ralph Mechur • Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein

Interim Superintendents: Dr. Christopher King and Dr. Sylvia Rousseau