

Visual & Performing Arts District Advisory Committee (VAPA DAC)

September 23, 2020 (via teleconference)

MINUTES

Attendees: Annie Azzariti, Deborah Berek, Rebecca Cardenas, Wendy Denbo, Scott Ferguson, Janis Gabbert, Jerry Gibson, Linda Greenberg, Zina Josephs, Barbara Knowlton, Dr. Maria Leon-Vazquez, Elizabeth Manco, Steve Massetti, Dr. Jacqueline Mora, Lydia Muraro, Domi Piturro, Alisa Stewart, Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein, Ann Thanawalla, Carey Upton, Tom Whaley

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by Vice Chair Lydia Muraro.
2. **VAPA facilities update** -- Carey Upton, Chief Operations Officer, presented an update on the John Adams Middle School Performing Arts Center construction project, aided by Jerry Gibson and Steve Massetti. Completion is expected in March 2021, with a grand opening in Fall 2021. Re the campus assessments, community meetings will be held at all the elementary and middle schools in October. There will be a Master Plan for each campus, with 5 or 6 projects. \$88 million is available from SMS (\$430 million for all projects). Decisions will be made by December. Questions were asked about leaks in the Samohi band and choir rooms (all have been repaired at a cost of \$120,000) and about restroom upgrades and adequate hand washing stations (all is in preparation).
3. **Minutes** from the February meeting were approved by unanimous consent. (Berek)
4. **P.S. ARTS** – Rebecca Cardenas reported that all programs this year will be for 15 weeks (no 30-week programs). Live synchronous classes will be provided, with staggered start dates. With support from the Ed Foundation, small art kits for each student will be distributed. Rebecca thanked Tom Whaley and Dr. Mora for helping her with organization and communication.
5. **Administrative Co-Chairperson** – Dr. Mora reported that teachers are working hard on distance learning. The district is finalizing an internal survey of teachers, students, and parents regarding the implementation of distance learning. Guidelines are being developed for in-person services for students with special needs and English language learners, as well as in-person assessments for students with IEPs.
6. **Staff Liaison and VAPA Coordinator** – Tom Whaley reported on the following:

- a. **Staff changes** – Joni Swenson has retired, Jim Wang has replaced her at Samohi, and Sam Lorenzini has replaced Jim at Lincoln MS. Sean Sonderreger has replaced one of the elementary music teachers. Lincoln MS art teacher Kate Pomatti has retired, and Ahn Tran from Olympic HS has replaced her.
 - b. **Distance learning** – Other districts are just starting to explore what SMMUSD is already doing with VAPA instruction, with Zoom Plus, Google Classroom, SmartMusic (music learning software), BandLab for Education platform, and Jamulus (internet jam session software). John Castillo set up servers. Students hear a downbeat so they can stay together. They rehearse in small groups then record their tracks. The director can give feedback, and the tracks can be mixed later for a virtual concert.
 - c. **Professional development** – Embedded PD is starting October 6, set up in a series.
 - d. **Elementary Instrumental Music Back-to-School Nights** – Elementary music teachers created an Elementary Music Resource Webpage – <https://sites.google.com/smmk12.org/elementary-music-resources/home>
The Back-to-School slide show for parents includes short presentations by Tom and each of the teachers, plus a short DAC video that Janis Gabbert filmed.
Re DACS, Zina commented that the Health & Safety DAC hasn't met since February, even though their members include health care professionals and their charge includes: "**Focus on best practices for handling outbreaks of communicable diseases.**" Dr. Mora will follow up.
 - e. **Mariachi** -- The mariachi program started on September 22nd.
 - f. **Other impacts of the pandemic:** The Bergmann endowment provided 51 additional instruments, and teachers were provided with PPE to use when handing out instruments and music. There will be no 4th or 5th grade dance programs. The funding will be used to provide a video of a theater performance for 4th grade classrooms.
 - g. Tom thanked Alisa Stewart and Lydia Muraro for their help.
7. **Board of Education Liaisons** – Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein commented on the Brown Paper Tickets issue. Lydia successfully advocated for the district to reimburse the VAPA programs that did not receive their share of tickets sales. Alisa Stewart, a 10-year Samohi band parent, thanked Tom, Lydia, Richard TJ, and Dr. Mora, as the band had lost \$5,100, Stairway \$10,000, and Samohi Theatre \$18,500.

Dr. TJ reported that the Board is deeply engaged with the community in this time of COVID, what the plus might be, making the arts part of the plus, and getting students back on campus in some way ASAP. Parents' attitudes range from wanting kids back on campus "yesterday" to wanting to wait for a vaccine.

Dr. Maria Leon-Vazquez commented that it takes a village to make sure education in the arts continues and thanked everyone for their efforts. Domi Piturro noted that, in teaching at SMC and USC, sculpture has gone digital, and he suggested that some middle and high school students could do digital graphics.

The largest enrollment decline this year is kindergarten at 20%, but Dr. Mora noted that kindergarten is not mandated. Dr. TJ reported the "The Nutcracker" ballet will be filmed at The Broad Stage and shared online with SMMUSD students. On October 9 and 10, SMC will also host a drive-in movie, "Grace and Grit," in the Bundy Campus parking lot. He also reported that, as part of the city's economic recovery plan, the Cultural Affairs Division has launched a \$500,000 grant program entitled "Art of Recovery" -- <https://www.santamonica.gov/arts/artofrecovery> -- Inspired by the WPA-era's Federal Art Project, this initiative will put artists to work to implement projects that will strengthen and connect Santa Monica, focusing on three main priorities: economic recovery, community connectedness & restorative justice, and public health & safety.

8. SMMUSD Distance Learning Guide 2020-21 --

<https://www.smmusd.org/DistanceLearningGuide> -- Zina noted that DAC members whose children are not current K-12 students might be interested in the district's distance learning guide for parents.

9. Draft 6-Year Arts Education Strategic Plan update -- Tom reported that the plan is ready to go but has been temporarily shelved while the district focuses on providing distance learning.

10. VAPA elective choices

a. Public comment: Wendy Dembo, parent of a Lincoln MS 7th grader, reported on the status of Visual Arts instruction. She stated that her daughter is a visual learner, so art is especially important to her. Elementary school students receive art instruction from P.S. ARTS. In the LMS 6th grade Exploratory, there is only 10 weeks of art instruction. There is no 7th grade art class. If a 7th grader is able to enroll in art, it's the 8th grade art class. In contrast, at JAMS students can take year-long art classes. One LMS 8th grade student couldn't get into the 8th grade art class and already knew Spanish, so the only other option was music. Meanwhile, there are 4 levels of band, choir, and orchestra instruction at LMS. Equitable access to instruction is an issue.

Tom noted that there used to be an additional 0.6 FTE art teacher at LMS, but she left some years ago to teach at Beverly Hills HS, and there's now an issue with inadequate instructional space for an additional art teacher. Lydia suggested that it's the DAC's job to advise the BOE, suggest solutions, and collaborate with the principal. Dr. Mora suggested continuing the conversations, that the DAC could find out the numbers of students who request but don't get into art classes, determine what the barriers are, and come up with plausible solutions. She also noted that when the Master Schedule is developed, the number of teachers and students is involved. Lydia reported that 175 students requested art, and 125 were served.

VAPA electives in 6th and 9th grade – Lydia commented that if a student takes AVID in 7th grade, it becomes their elective from then on. JAMS offers AM P.E. for Immersion students to free up a period. The BOE asks why there aren't more minority students in advanced music classes, but diversity is being weeded out – we're failing at "access." Dr. Mora noted that the AVID class at LMS has been eliminated due to reduced student interest.

11. **DAC 3-year terms** -- Sarah Wahrenbrock re DAC member terms expiring: "Because everything is a little chaotic due to the pandemic, the board isn't letting current terms expire."
12. **Calendar review** – revised DAC meeting schedule: September 23, October 21, December 2, January 13, February 24, April 28, and May 12
13. **Public comments regarding items no on the agenda** – None.
14. **Agenda planning for October meeting** – Possible update from Steve Masseti
15. **Adjournment** -- 8:45 PM