



December 16, 2022

## **Superintendent's Message: Farewell SMMUSD**

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, Students and Community Members,

I write this last message to the community with both a heavy heart and optimism for SMMUSD. My heart is heavy because this is, in fact, my last official message to you as your proud superintendent as I will be joining the Bellflower Unified School District (BUSD) as their new superintendent starting January 1, 2023. My optimism is due to knowing that we are collectively in the middle of something great with respect to us transforming the District. We have been working together to reach greater heights in the pursuit of:

- adjusting the system to increase student engagement and to instill the love of learning for our students
- adjusting our assumptions as educators and community in order to make better decisions and adjusting programming that will lead to ensuring that all students have what they need academically and socio-emotionally
- accepting and incorporating multiple perspectives of lived experiences in curriculum that will lead to a more rich, relevant, and holistic education experiences.

All of the above will lead to the district reaching its mission of providing extraordinary education for all students while closing the gap in achievement with historically underserved and marginalized students.

I am proud to have played a role in the development and execution of the difficult, but courageous and necessary conversations, and the development of strategies and programs. I am mostly proud of the shift and increased awareness of what needs to be done to reach the District's mission.

I want to thank the SMMUSD Board of Education for entrusting in me the responsibility of serving as steward of the most important job in the United States, aside from parenting, and that is the education of the youth in America. This is so they can acquire the skills to live fruitful and productive lives for themselves and their loved ones, but also attain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society, and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with people from diverse groups to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good.

To the staff, thank you for taking on the profession of education. I realize in today's time, many of you, along with other public-serving agencies such as nurses, doctors, police officers, and so on, have had to deal with anger and frustration directed at you for wanting to help communities during a very challenging time in the world's history with the impact of COVID, social unrest and awareness, and challenges to American democracy. To this I say, continue to be the beacon of

hope, encouragement, and example for our youth and the world to see your significance to the stability of America and the world.

To the students, it has been an absolute pleasure watching you grow, succeed, and go on to join the world as productive citizens. I hope you know that you are the focus, treasure, and pride of adults, and we would do almost anything to secure your future, even though our actions as adults may sometimes appear confusing or contrary. Continue to reach for the stars, and while I will be admiring you from a different location, I will definitely be rooting for you.

To the parents, I want to thank you for your support, engagement, volunteerism, and partnership. Please know that you are instrumental in shaping the success of the District. The partnership between the school district and parents is essential and needs to be coordinated in a way that will align interests, goals, priorities, and expected outcomes in order for the partnership to deliver the promise of making the system better for all students. Please continue to advocate for your child, while respecting that decisions are made with the greater population in mind and to remember that if ever disappointed about a decision that is not in alignment with the one personal need. The staff will continue to engage with you and provide access to information, so we can all work together to provide an excellent education for all students. If you want to be connected to what is happening at your sites, please participate at the respective principal chat, PTA, school site council, ELAC, BAPAAC, Puente, LGBTQ+ and other official parent group meetings. These parent affinity groups are there to provide opportunities for systematic and coordinated involvement by parents. Please check with your school site for information.

To community partners of SMMUSD including: Boys and Girls Clubs of Santa Monica and Malibu, City of Santa Monica, City of Malibu, chambers of commerce and various community partners such as Rotary, Santa Monica Education Foundation, Santa Monica College, Saint Johns and UCLA Hospitals, SEIU Local 99, SMMCTA, Kiwanis, PAL, SMRR, CEPS, local law enforcement agencies and other groups, your involvement in and support of the school district are essential, and I thank you for keeping the children of Santa Monica and Malibu in the forefront of your thoughts and supportive actions.

Lastly, I want to say that these past six years have been an experience I will cherish forever. I hope I've made some lifelong friends. I have certainly learned a lot from you, and my family and I will be eternally grateful for your welcome and allowing me to be superintendent of SMMUSD. I will be rooting for all of you, and I will not be a stranger to the community.

With the deepest gratitude,

Ben Amuku Drati, Ed.D.