



8500 E. Jackrabbit Road
Scottsdale, Arizona 85250

Telephone: 480-484-6100
Website: www.susd.org

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Dear Scottsdale Unified School District Families,

The New Year has kicked off with some major District events of note. On Jan. 13, the Cherokee Elementary School community gathered to celebrate the 'official' beginning of the estimated 18-month project that will result in a beautiful, collaboratively designed campus the Chargers can call home for many decades to come. Cherokee students put their stamp on the ceremony, performing songs and dances of their own creation to mark the momentous occasion. If you've never thought construction fence signage can be artistically engaging, take a drive past Cherokee's 56th Street campus to see how students are visually 'owning' the rebuild.

The SUSD Governing Board's top officers have switched positions for 2020, with Board members unanimously electing Allyson Beckham their President, taking over from Patty Beckman, who will serve as Vice President this year. I look forward to working with both of these excellent, volunteer public servants and the rest of the Governing Board as we continue to fine-tune District operations to provide the best learning and teaching opportunities to our 23,000 students and outstanding cadre of educators.

Later this week, the Board will begin reviewing the applications of the people seeking to become SUSD's next superintendent, and next month, on Feb. 21, the Board and five committees representing the SUSD community, including parents, students, teachers, administrators and staff, will interview finalists for the post. When my career with SUSD ends in June, I know I will be turning over to my successor a strong, cohesive District that I have had the privilege of helping strengthen over the last two years. The work has been demanding and so worthwhile.

I am particularly grateful that you, also, believe SUSD is on the right path forward, based on marked improvements in the results of last fall's climate survey of our community. Findings from the online Hanover Research study indicate that our stakeholders are happy with the District's direction and school leadership, and they support and are engaged in our schools.

As with the inaugural survey in 2018, a majority of the more than 14,000 respondents expressed their desire to see us to do more to support and develop students' social-emotional skills. We have, in fact, been focused on that task during the past year; the work is ongoing, with new training programs scheduled for administrators and staff in coming months. This training will assist adults in our schools to recognize students who are struggling or in crisis in some manner, and how best to reach out to them.

You also expressed the desire in the Hanover survey that we prioritize the support of under-achieving students and students with mental health challenges, and you have directed us to take additional steps to further address student bullying and harassment, which we continue to support. We will also delve into the disparity the survey discovered between how students and parents perceive on-campus safety.

The bottom line is that through your responses, you are helping us build a better school district from every possible angle. I very much appreciate your participation in the survey and your ongoing candor.

At this month's Governing Board meeting, we celebrated some outstanding achievements. Six teachers – Brittany Bouslog, Cocopah Middle School; Carmen Buchanan, Arcadia High School; Lori Campos, Cherokee Elementary School; Tammy Kohli, Desert Canyon Elementary School; Lindsey Saylor, Cheyenne Traditional School; and Sarah Wagner-Boustila, Arcadia High School – have recently become National Board Certified teachers, the most respected professional certification available in U.S. K-12 education. Six others – Tammy Andreas, Cochise Elementary School; Katheryn Honeycutt, Desert Canyon Elementary School; Laurie Jones-Ritt, Cherokee Elementary School; Laura Kamka, Desert Mountain High School; Kelly O'Rourke, Desert Canyon Middle School; and Debbie Voris, Hopi Elementary School – have had their National Board certifications renewed for another 10 years. Congratulations, SUSD teaching professionals, on going the extra mile to bring the very best instruction to your students and classrooms!

We also celebrated Desert Mountain High School senior Jake Okun, whom state Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman has recommended be named a 2020 U.S. Presidential Scholar in Career and Technical Education for his achievements in the fields of computer graphic design and robotics.

Speaking of robotics, SUSD elementary and middle school teams fared extremely well in the recent *FIRST* Lego League (FLL) state championship at Arizona State University. Congratulations to Cheyenne's Roadrunners, Desert Canyon Middle's DC Voltz and Gnomes, Echo Canyon's Echobots, Tonalea's Tiborgs and Yavapai's Thunderbots! While the FLL season is now over, middle school VEX IQ and high school *FIRST* Tech Challenge competitions are underway, and the *FIRST* Robotics season is getting underway at the high school level.

Congratulations also are in order for Copper Ridge 7th grade student Emma McGreevy, who last week out-spelled 22 other SUSD school spelling bee winners to take the District's 2020 Spelling Bee crown. Emma and five runners-up will represent SUSD in the Region 2 Spelling Bee next month in Deer Valley.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the outstanding MLK Youth Voices program at Saguaro High School on Jan. 16. This year, ASU head football coach Herm Edwards addressed students from around SUSD and the Valley on confronting adversity and racism. Speaking from the heart about overcoming obstacles in his own life, Coach Edwards' speech was inspiring, as were the performances by Saguaro student speakers, singers and musicians. SUSD is proud to host this annual Community Celebrating Diversity organization event celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and I am truly honored to have received its Diversity Award this year.

Respectfully,



John Kriekard, Ed.D.
Superintendent