

## How AUSD Educators Engaged Students around the January 6 Insurrection

As news broke of the insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, AUSD educators and administrators immediately began thinking of how best to engage and support students during a historic – and potentially frightening – event.

District staff moved quickly to gather together resources for any teachers and families who wanted tips on how best to address the unsettling news with students. And in virtual classrooms across the district, educators developed lesson plans aimed at helping students to both understand what was happening politically and sort through their own feelings. It would be impossible to detail all of the lessons and activities that centered on the events of January 6, but here are a few examples.

At **Alameda High School**, for instance, Paul Igaz, who teaches Digital Film, knew as soon as he heard the news from Washington DC that he wanted to give his students “the opportunity to explore, process, and articulate their perspectives on the seditious riots at the US Capitol.”

After watching a PBS NewHour summary of Wednesday's events and analyzing the speeches of President Trump and President-elect Biden, Igaz invited his students to create their own video message to Americans. Igaz then compiled the messages in a ten-minute video. The videos included expressions of both anger (e.g., “what we had to witness yesterday was utterly disappointing and an embarrassment to this country”) and the need for unity (e.g., “In times of crisis we should stand together. We should be kind to others and support one another, even when our opinions conflict.”)

At **Wood Middle School**, Ellen Mulholland, who teaches English Language Learners and journalism, created a “JamBoard” (an online collaborative whiteboard tool) to help students process their thoughts and feelings about the insurrection. Mulholland provided some facts about the insurrection, as well as sentence prompts for her students. The students responded with their own thoughts, such as, “This event concerned me because this could be a possible uprising of another civil war,” and “I saw disrespect. I noticed that police weren’t as harsh as they were with BLM and I wonder why.”

Another Wood teacher, Matthew Geesey, created a Google slide show and asked each student to distill their emotions from the day into one word that they could share on a slide. Then the class reviewed the presentation. "It was an informative, thought-provoking, and awe inspiring day," the 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher said. "These students that I have are so smart, so deep, and so aware of things."

In the **Remote Learning Program**, teacher Mary Otieku had her fourth grade students journal about their understanding of and reaction to the insurrection. Ms. Otieku then tied the January 6 events back to what the students had learned about elections and the voting process last November. Stressing the need for honesty, Ms. Otieku added, "Next week, and the following weeks, I will continue to address as much as needed. I will most likely add in some picture books that relate to injustice, democracy, kindness, and overcoming challenging times."

Amanda Simons, a fourth grade teacher at **Paden Elementary**, highlighted facts and key terms from the events on January 6 and then compared that incident to other marches and protests from the summer, including the reactions of police and law enforcement. Paden 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Michael Wong linked the insurrection into the students' current work on credible sources and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade standard on government.

Like Mr. Igaz, **Encinal Jr. & Sr. High School** teacher Kevin Gorham had students review a timeline of events that preceded the attack on the Capitol, compare and contrast the speeches of President Trump and President-elect Biden, and write 30-second messages with what they believed Americans needed to hear. Some of those messages were then read over KJTZ, the student-run radio station at Encinal.

"To my community, know that we will get through these recent tragic events in the Capitol together," wrote one student. "We are the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. Although we have not seemed very united due to the many people who have disrespected, rioted, and violently committed atrocities in our Capitol, know that as a nation will and must do better."

"The storm on capitol hill this week is a demonstration of just how polarized the United States has become," wrote another. "In order to truly heal, we must unite and take solace in our unity... There is so much hatred and anger in the United States right now that must cease if we are going to move forward."

Noted Mr. Gorham, "My goal was to provide a platform where students could get their questions answered and express their feelings and fears about this unfortunate event. It was also a way for me to assure to them that our American Democracy would survive in spite of what these demonstrators were attempting to do."

AUSD staff and teachers are likewise preparing to support student if there is unrest next week in relation to the inauguration.