

## AUSD Educators Engage in 6-Day Learning Conference

On May 18, the Board of Education approved staff's recommendation that AUSD schools end their distance learning program on May 29 rather than the formerly scheduled June 8. The reason for the early dismissal was that staff and educators alike believed the last six days of school could be better spent collaborating with teachers and offering them opportunities to prepare for next year's program.

The resulting "Learning Conference," which took place between June 3 and June 11, focused on three primary areas:

1. Becoming familiar with best practices for remote and blended learning
2. Learning new technological strategies for remote instruction
3. Becoming familiar with culturally responsive and trauma-informed teaching

The goal, says Chief Academic Officer Sara Stone, who organized the conference, was to "prepare our educators not only on the technology and instructional practices we need to transition to a more rigorous remote instructional model but the social emotional supports we will need to have in place to help our students thrive next fall."

### Remote and blended learning models and strategies

"Remote" learning refers to learning outside the classroom. "Blended" learning combines remote learning and traditional in-person instruction. Currently AUSD is considering providing families an option to enroll their students either in a fully remote program or a blended program next fall.

"Educators have been exploring blended learning for several decades," Stone says. "It has long been thought to enable better outcomes, provide better technology training, and allow for more student choice, voice, and empowerment than traditional in-person instruction. These times are stressful, but I am honestly excited about the opportunities for the innovative student-centered, student-driven learning that a blended model provides."

The Learning Conference organizers were aware that any remote instruction that takes place next fall (whether it is the wholly remote model or the blended model) needs to be more rigorous than the temporary distance learning opportunities provided in response to the pandemic this spring, as well as include both more accountability and more assessments, and be more engaging to help keep students engaged.

*"I am so impressed with all the curated materials of the conference so far...I feel that we as educators never get a chance to actually look at and discuss research! I am glad I have all summer to dive into them. I am sensing a big shift in education and Alameda seems to be proving to be a vanguard. Today I delved into the standards/mastery based grading... and I love it!"*  
Kirsten Bramstedt, Encinal Jr. & Sr. High School

As such, session topics and readings during the week included training on:


- Supporting student choice, voice, and motivation during blended learning
- Promoting engagement in remote learning
- Focusing on standards
- Creating community in remote learning
- Using technology to improve instruction in blended learning (e.g., how to use Google Classroom, Clever, Jamboard, and other educational apps effectively, and how to create podcasts, integrate video in Google slides, and live stream school events)
- Using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports to manage virtual classrooms
- Remote and blended learning strategies for students receiving special education services

Moreover, AUSD educators were given a chance to learn by listening to keynote speakers, reading and watching videos on their own, and collaborating in small groups - exactly the way that students will learn via blended learning next fall.

"We intentionally designed the June Learning conference to model blended learning," Stone says. "We had a mix of 'direct instruction' through our keynote speakers: Zaretta Hammond, Mark Salinas, and Susan Andrien, group learning through our Home Collaborations, and self-paced learning through readings and webinars. Overwhelmingly, teachers found this structure meaningful and gratifying."

### **Culturally responsive teaching**

Sometimes confused with multicultural instruction, "culturally responsive teaching" - as defined by educational consultant Zaretta Hammond - is a neuroscience-based teaching framework that focuses on nurturing and building the cognitive capacity of students from diverse backgrounds. It emphasizes the importance of building relationships and explicitly teaching learning skills and critical thinking abilities to help students become independent learners.



*"[Since the conference] I'm looking at everything through the 'what do they have/can they do/do they know' lens instead of through the 'how behind will they be' lens. Thank you!" Heather Wu, Alameda High School*

"We recognize that our current situation has caused trauma for many, and that for some, ongoing trauma has been exacerbated," notes Tanya Harris, principal of Otis Elementary School "The week of professional learning allowed us to consider ways that will intentionally meet the social and emotional needs of our students."

Sessions addressing this topic during the Learning Conference included:

- Trauma-informed practices

- Educator self care
- Arts-integration and creativity
- Supporting student mental health
- Responding to student stress in COVID-19

### **Peer-to-peer collaboration**

Throughout the six days, participants also had opportunities to meet with educators from their school, educators who teach the same grade (e.g., 3rd), and educators who teach the same subject (e.g., science or math) to identify best practices for teaching next year.

“When we were planning the conference we knew that we wanted our educators to be learning from each other, not just from ‘experts’ or ‘trainers,’” Stone said. “Our greatest resource is the teachers that we already have working here. I was thrilled with the amount of collaboration, brainstorming, and inquiry that our educators were willing to do with each other during these extra days of professional development this year.”

Notes Superintendent Pasquale Scuderi, “This conference revealed what we already know to be true: That when educators are given space to connect, collaborate, and create together, they become one another’s best sources of both professional learning and inspiration. The amount of collaboration and planning time allocated to educators in our country and in our state is tiny relative to the complexity involved in good teaching, and relative to what is afforded teachers in more consistent and successful education systems globally. I hope these six days help us see our way in the long term to a more expansive set of comparable opportunities for educators in Alameda.”

### **Resources**

#### Keynote speeches

##### [Recording of Zaretta Hammond’s keynote address](#)

Hammond is the author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* and a literacy consultant.

##### [Recording of Mark Salinas’ keynote address](#)

Salinas is the Director of the Center for Equity Leadership with the National Equity Project.

##### [Recording of Susan Andrien’s keynote address](#)

Andrien is a Behavioral Health Program Manager at Oakland Unified School District and co-host of “The Awakening Educator” podcast.