



WINTER 2022  
SPECIAL EDITION



# THE DISTRICT BRIDGE

Equity in Action



Dear Friends,

When I began working in our district nearly 13 years ago, I was met by a community motivated by the belief that all children were capable of social, emotional, and academic learning; a community dedicated to ensuring each of our students would achieve their full potential.

The concept is simple on paper, but if we really care about students, it requires more than just delivering creative and interesting lessons. Progressing toward the vision means preparing lessons and supports designed so that each student will succeed. Importantly, it also means each adult seeks to understand the assets and needs of the students and families they serve.

We have learned over the years that to make learning opportunities accessible to all, we must recognize and embrace the differences among the children we teach. Each of the nearly 6,000 children who come through our doors each day is shaped by their backgrounds, strengths, and past experiences. By listening and learning to our children and families, we are better prepared to help our children to see their own value, find their talents, and excel. We are also better able to identify the issues that create barriers to learning, such as racial, cultural, or religious discrimination. Among other obstacles to academic growth are emotional and behavioral challenges, learning differences, and economic insecurity. Whatever the issues, when we better understand them we can provide measures and support that make our classes more constructive and inclusive.

**This is what we mean by equity.** It's about greater achievement for all and the joy of seeing our children soar.

Thank you for supporting our efforts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Gallagher'.

Michael Gallagher, Ed.D.  
Superintendent, Sunnyvale School District

## OUR SCHOOLS

Bishop Elementary  
Cherry Chase Elementary  
Cumberland Elementary  
Ellis Elementary  
Fairwood Explorer  
Lakewood Tech EQ  
San Miguel Elementary  
Vargas Elementary  
Columbia Middle  
Sunnyvale Middle

## SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Jeffrey Arnett  
Isabel Jubes-Flamerich  
Michelle Maginot  
Nancy Newkirk  
Bridget Watson

## Academic Equity — Commitment to Equity Means Commitment to Kids

Longtime underrepresentation, bias, and lack of opportunity in some populations have created disparities in health, income, and well-being that directly impact students in our learning community. By understanding this and addressing individual needs we not only help to mitigate barriers to learning, but we also create a productive and collaborative class climate, benefiting every child we serve. We work to build empathy and awareness, along with academic skills, to prepare students for personal success and to steward a more just future.

While special interventions are not new in our district, our recent work reflects a deeper understanding of how to best meet individual needs, especially those of children who have been marginalized or poorly treated because of their differences.

We started our renewed effort in 2020, when each school community created an equity statement. Drawing from those, the Board of Education crafted a statement for the entire District, which is intended to inform decisions about our priorities and resource allocation every day.

Each school was then tasked with creating an equity plan with built-in action steps that will give every student the chance to reach their full and unique potential.





## Our Equity Statement

Adopted by the Sunnyvale School District Board of Education, 11/04/21

In the Sunnyvale School District, we believe that equity leads to learning without limits.

We commit to:

- Working together with families, staff, students, and community to address the individual supports that each student requires to flourish
- Mitigating structural barriers and bias that hinder students' ability to thrive and creating a system where success is not determined by identity factors
- Engaging in reflective practices, including two-way communication with all community members, evaluation of resource allocation, and examination of policy and practice
- Empowering all learners by recognizing the cultural assets that students and communities hold in order to provide a tailored education with supports, access, and opportunities so they reach their full, unique potential.

This statement is more than just words on a page. It informs how we teach, allocate resources, form policies, structure our communications, create learning environments, and forge community partnerships.



## Culture and Climate Equity — Listening With Our Hearts

The best learning begins with trusting relationships. When our students feel seen, understood, and accepted, they are more likely to engage in class. We work to know and respect each individual child so we can identify and meet their needs.

Throughout our district, we have implemented an educational approach that considers the social, emotional, and cultural aspects of teaching and learning. The approach may look different from school to school, but each ensures that students recognize themselves in the books they read and are encouraged to draw on their own experiences for classroom projects. As a result, our teachers understand students better, craft more effective lessons, and build relationships that help to foster high levels of achievement.

Our classroom climate has also been strengthened by the district-wide implementation of Multiple Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), a framework that helps educators provide academic, social-emotional, cultural, and behavioral strategies for students with various needs.

Basic interventions are provided for all children under the first tier of support, and this helps them feel secure in their school environment. From there, children move to increasingly personalized and supportive interventions as needed.



## Resource Equity — Equipped for Success

Historically, our nation's children have had unequal access to education. While recent decades have seen improvement, inequities still exist, which means the one-size-fits-all approach to public education is ineffective for many.

But we now know that what was once considered an *achievement* gap among students is actually an *opportunity* gap — something we can, and do, strategically address, and with great success. Our students have shown us that when we meet their varying needs with appropriate support, there is no limit to what they can achieve.

We connect families to a wide range of support including food, financial resources, tutoring, and counseling. In the early days of the pandemic, we provided computers, Internet hotspots, and supplies, and offered meals in a safe, drive-through format.

With children back on campus, our support has expanded to include designated “equitable outcomes” teachers at each school to supplement the equity work already being done by our social workers, assistant principals, health assistants, and others.

*The result is a team of professionals carrying out an actionable equity plan supported by District leadership to help all students to grow according to their full, unique potential.*



## Creating Community. Empowering Learners.

Creating and implementing our equity plan means continual evaluation of our progress in *providing equitable access to opportunities for our students.*

Our community partners help us provide our students and families with valuable access to resources. We work closely with experts in areas like mental health, fitness, reading assistance, and social services support to make sure students have what they need to thrive. We continue to deepen our understanding of the issues that impact equity as we develop a more comprehensive approach to providing support needed for success while also removing barriers to learning.

Our intentional work in social-emotional learning — which helps students to develop empathy, recognize and name their own feelings and emotions, and discuss or manage them in a productive way — helps create a safe and inclusive environment.

Of course, rich and engaging curriculum at every school helps bring learning opportunities to our children every day.

If you have any ideas that could help us achieve our equity vision, please reach out to us at [alia.wilson@sesd.org](mailto:alia.wilson@sesd.org). We appreciate your help and support in carrying out our core values.



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[www.sesd.org](http://www.sesd.org)

We are proud of the many local, regional and state awards our district and schools have recently earned including:

- 2021 City of Sunnyvale *Business of the Year*
- California School Boards Association Golden Bell Award: Ellis Elementary
- AAA rating for financial health from S&P Global Ratings, a bond rating agency. This puts the District in the top 3 percent of school districts in the state.

Visit our website at [sesd.org](http://sesd.org) to learn more!

All photos were taken pre-pandemic.

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