Greetings,

It's hard to believe we're heading into the final week of the school year. Seriously, wasn't it just September?! It seems like yesterday we were cheering-on the football team, planning for Trunk-or-Treat Street, getting excited about the prospect of a snowday, (well everyone but me), and dare I say - navigating an extremely tough budget season that seemed to have lasted forever. Yet, it's already been a month since the budget vote. Somehow, here we are. We're powering through Regents exams, moving up ceremonies, field days, picnics, and for me about 1,267 end-of-year emails. Still, we're in fact nearly there! So close I can smell the sunscreen and warm ocean breeze.

Yesterday, it really felt like all of a sudden it was actually summer. Like it happened overnight. And today, it officially is! The summer solstice and longest day of sunlight of the year! I'm not sure anyone can be unhappy about that. Additionally, schools were closed in observance of Juneteenth, a day that marks a pivotal moment in our nation's history. It serves as a reminder of the enduring pursuit of freedom, progress, and dignity for all. While we each may reflect on it in our own way, it's a meaningful opportunity to appreciate how far we've come and how we continue to grow as a community. I had an opportunity to attend a celebration in Brooklyn and it was nice to be surrounded by love and great vibes. We've in fact come so far.

Sadly, this week also brought the heartbreaking news of the passing of Mr. Ben Harper, an incredible advocate, mentor, and friend to so many of us. In his capacity working for the EOC, Ben didn't just talk about service, he lived it. Whether at our Community Resource Meetings, Compass Unity meetings, Fifth Precinct discussions, or community events, he showed up with a calm strength, a generous heart, and an unwavering belief in the potential of our young people. He made people feel seen, heard, and supported. His absence is already felt deeply, and his legacy will remain a guiding light for the work we continue to do. I'm so saddened by his loss, but inspired to keep his spirit alive by continuing to work towards the advocacy of our community and ALL children. It's my purpose and I'm committed to it.

As we close out this school year, let's take stock of everything we've been through together. There's still a few more things to check off our collective to-do lists (and probably at least one surprise fire drill), but the finish line is in sight and that most certainly feels good.

Wishing everyone a strong and celebratory last week - and as always, thank you for everything you do to lift up our students and one another. It really is a privilege serving you as your superintendent of schools.

With appreciation,
Tony Santana
#clipperPRIDE