



District English Learner Advisory Committee
San Mateo Union High School District
Report to the Board of Education for the 2020-21 School Year

The DELAC vision is that our English Learner students are loved, supported, understood, and successful in our schools.

SMUHSD EL Vision

In the San Mateo Union High School District (SMUHSD) we understand the success of our English Learners is the collective responsibility of all educators in partnership with our families and communities. The SMUHSD is committed to providing our English Learners a rigorous and relevant academic education and the socio-emotional support they need to be engaged in our schools and graduate college and career ready. We value the rich cultural and linguistic diversity English Learners bring to our schools and community, and believe in using culturally responsive practices to respect and affirm the language and culture of each student.

Submitted to: The SMUHSD Board of Trustees:

Robert H. Griffin, President
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Presented by the 2020-21 SY DELAC Committee

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Introduction

Our committee worked diligently this year to review data, gather feedback from families at our school sites, and have collaborative discussions to develop this report. When schools closed over a year ago, we learned to use Zoom and made the switch to meeting online. The families we represent have been some of the hardest hit by the pandemic. Immigrant communities; Latino communities, among other communities of color have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Two of our own DELAC members lost a parent to the pandemic. Many of the families we represent faced additional unprecedented challenges: job loss, lack of health care coverage, and food insecurity. Add to this the challenge our English Learners faced in a year of distance learning, losing the support of teachers and support staff that they relied on tremendously. We are happy to see a return to campus, although zooming in a room is not the most ideal learning scenario for the students we represent. Nonetheless, we are a resilient community and rely on one another in times of need and we have come through for one another.

One thing we would like to remind the board about is the glaring inequity in access to technology that the school closings brought to light. District teachers were using Canvas as a medium to post school assignments and homework and resources before closing. This led students to have to rely on staying after school if they could, or using their phones or a public library for access. This is not the same as a student who has a laptop and high speed wifi access at home. Also, schools are now opening and students need to bring their computers to school each day. We appreciate the efforts the district has made to distribute computers and Wi-Fi access points since the school closed, but we hope that this need, which exceeded expectations, will continue to be met as the district continues to infuse technology into teaching and learning. We recommend that each new English Learner student receive a computer for home use and access to Wi-Fi when needed.

Commendations

We would like to commend the district for the following:

1. Providing food services to students and families that needed it. The efforts of administrators and staff in coordinating the distribution of food was extraordinary. We appreciate all of the sites who organized food pantries and distributed gift cards to families in need. Both Hillsdale High School and San Mateo High School, with support from the transportation and nutrition departments, were able to get families weekly and monthly help.
2. Organizing the Internet connection through Comcast Internet Essentials Partnership Program. The collaboration between SMUHSD and Comcast enabled some low-income families to connect to the internet at home.
3. Implementing learning PODS on campus to support students who needed it, particularly our ELD students. We know that Bridge, San Mateo and Hillsdale served many students through their learning PODS.
4. Hosting monthly virtual town halls in Spanish. The Family Engagement Coordinators, in collaboration with community agencies and district leadership were able to bring much needed information to families. We especially appreciate superintendent Kevin Skelly for attending almost every Town Hall, in addition to the site administrators that made the effort to attend many as well.
5. Programming from the Wellness Department in Spanish for families. This was much needed during this time.
6. Increasing the amount of communication from the district in Spanish.
7. We would like to especially commend the teachers who went above and beyond to maintain their classes and teach our students while often having to take care of their own children and families.

Recommendations

1. Communication - Be Proactive

- a. We need teachers, counselors, and administrators to communicate with us about our student's progress- or lack thereof - early on, and in a variety of ways (text, phone call, email).
 - i. Many times they only communicate if the student is not doing well in school but that is when they already have a poor grade, and often it is too late to change it. Also, many times the communication is not from the teachers.
 - ii. We hardly hear from teachers and counselors unless our student is doing wrong. Our students are English learners, we want to know about the progress they are making. This cannot always be reflected in a grade or percentage.
 - iii. We would like to receive positive communication from school staff about our students as well.
- b. We need access to teachers and counselors. They often email but most families' preference is a phone call. Having a direct conversation is much easier than an email exchange. If they are going to email, they should include a number to call back. Most of our families do not know how to look for information under the staff members' signature to find a number.

- c. We need clear communication about the absence system. What counts as engaged and when will a student be considered not engaged? It seems inequitable to consider a student not engaged if they lost connection. A suggestion is to make sure that a student could call into the zoom.
- d. We need to make sure that communication in our home languages is consistent. There is no consistency among the school sites around translation of messages or information, and interpretation for family education events or orientations, and back to school nights, among others. It is better to attend events that are facilitated in our home languages versus offering interpretation. We are also concerned about families whose home languages are not Spanish and Chinese but where there seems to be a big population (i.e Arabic, Portuguese). There seems to always be a prioritization of monolingual families.
 - i. We suggest streamlining messaging. Between the district and the school site there are so many messages and for families who already struggle to navigate systems, this creates more overwhelm. There needs to be a reduction of messages and it needs to be very clear who and where the message is coming from.
 - ii. Make sure the appropriate audience is selected for the messages. Sometimes an entire school will get a message that really only applies to one grade level.

2. Student Support Services

- a. Continue providing students with the necessary technology they need to access their education (Computers, hotspots as needed/Comcast Internet Essentials program, headphones with a microphone)
 - i. Make sure students have access to the call in number for zoom so if they cannot connect via computer, they can call in.
- b. Provide academic support and tutoring after school hours focused on English Learners.
- c. Make sure that EL students have access to an appropriate academic support class (i.e Advisory like Hillsdale's model, AVID if they are a candidate, Guided Studies, Academic Language Development)
- d. If asynchronous days continue in the future, the expectations need to be clearly defined and communicated to students.
- e. ELD students need access to elective classes and more technical skill training
 - i. Often when a student is in ELD their options of electives are very limited. It seems that they are limited because of their language acquisition status.
 - ii. It would be great to have access to electives that taught students a technical skill that could get them "career ready".
- f. Integration into the school community is a recommendation we make every year. We understand the impact of the pandemic but pre-pandemic this was a continued challenge and it likely has grown since. We want to make sure that this is attended to.
 - i. Like all students, our students need opportunities for social interaction and connection.
 - 1. It would be great to see opportunities for enrichment beyond athletics.
 - ii. We would really like to see the Buddy Program we have suggested for the last few years be implemented. Pairing a beginning learner of English with a mainstream student who shares their home language would be a great way to help a student connect with more mainstream students and the school.
- g. We would like students to have access to Wellness Services after school hours.

3. Support Service for Families

- a. We would like to have classes for parents/guardians of ELD students to learn how to use a computer, email, CANVAS, and Zoom; The American education system, including graduation requirements. This could be coordinated through the Adult School.
- b. It would be great to have a program where a parent/guardian could check out a computer from the school district. This would allow them to check on their students' progress, attend meetings, and use them for classes.

- c. The continuation of programs like PIQE or something similar coordinated by the district
- d. Access to a social worker. It was apparent before the pandemic but became very clear during the pandemic that our EL community needs a social worker to help them through some very tough situations. Although the counselors and family engagement coordinators have been a big support, there are many cases that a social worker has more expertise in handling and helping.
- e. Coordination of a “families helping families” program that would connect new families with families that have been in the district. Families could be paired by same home languages, or through special programs like SPED or ELD. The new family would then have a sort of mentor family or coach to help support them, answer questions, etc.

4. District Processes

- a. There needs to be more coherence in grading practices among teachers.
 - i. There is so much variance in what is accepted by teachers - some allow late work without penalty, others do not; some allow test revisions, others do not; some take off points for late work based on the number of days. Some grade every single thing, others do not. This is confusing for students, particularly ELD students and seems to be a major equity issue. We believe assessment and grading practices need to be more student centered.
 - ii. Grades should be updated in Canvas in a timely manner so that students and their families are not surprised when there is a sudden change in grade or when they expect to see a higher grade because work has been submitted but not calculated in yet.
- b. School registration processes need to be easier to navigate for new families and families arriving from other countries.
 - i. The requirement for proving residency for new families and families from out of the country is very strict. Many of these families are living in multiple family homes and getting a rental contract or having something to prove residency is challenging. We would like the district to exercise some flexibility here.
 - ii. When a family already has a sibling in the school district, families of new students (freshmen) are being asked to provide the same documents the district already has on file.
- c. Communication about issues with school personnel
 - i. Families would like more transparency around how teachers and counselors are supervised and evaluated.
 - ii. Families would like to know what the process is for reporting an issue with a staff member, teacher or counselor.

We know that we are living through difficult times and that there are many things that the district and the board are dealing with. We appreciate all the incredible efforts that are being made to provide the best education for the district's students. We hope that you continue to consider the district's students who are the most vulnerable and who often thrive because of their relationships with teachers and staff and how the pandemic has affected this. There are parents who are listening to the board meetings but are often intimidated and therefore do not speak up. It is also hard to speak up since the set up for the board meeting is through interpretation. Therefore we want to encourage the board to come to a DELAC meeting and thank trustee Ligia Andrade Zuniga for attending our last meeting and introducing herself. We are an advisory board and are happy to support the district in any way we can.