Dear MPCSD Community,

Greetings from your local PK-8th grade school district. We serve the Menlo Park, Atherton, and East Palo Alto communities at our four schools: Encinal, Laurel, and Oak Knoll Elementary and Hillview Middle. We are in the third year of serving preschoolers aged 2.9-5 years at our Early Learning Center on two campuses, Laurel's Lower Campus and Oak Knoll. Thanks to your support, our schools continue to be highly sought after and make our community proud.

There is no clever or unique way to say what a strange and unprecedented year this has been. The coronavirus pandemic has changed so much about our lives, and perhaps education even more than almost anything else. Throughout the pandemic, the entire MPCSD community has come together in remarkable ways to continue providing an outstanding education; keep our teachers, staff, and students, safe; and take care of our most vulnerable families. We have now returned all grades kindergarten through eighth to in-person learning. Getting to this point was not easy or straightforward, but with everyone’s commitment to health and safety and the importance of in-person learning, with a robust virtual option for families and staff that required it, MPCSD is proud to have been the first public school district in the Bay Area to reopen its schools in a modified model with strict health and safety provisions for all. We are also partnering to offer COVID testing to our entire local community.

In this annual Community Report, we share our financial data, snapshots of our top priorities, and the story of how MPCSD navigated the complexities of a global pandemic with a decidedly local outcome. Thank YOU for being part of our story.

Sincerely,
Erik Burmeister
Superintendent

Superintendent Erik Burmeister, Assistant Superintendent Jammie Behrendt, and the MPCSD Leadership Cabinet

The Framework

MPCSD’s Whole Child Learning & Development Framework outlines the five strategic elements that we believe allow all our students to engage, achieve, and thrive. The foundational elements of Healthy & Collaborative Relationships and Integrated Well-being are the basis upon which the teaching and learning elements of Learner Centered, Competency & Evidence Based, and Meaningful Work are built. The culture we support and the program we offer are based on this Framework. Learn more at www.mpcsd.org.
We are COMMUNITY Funded

About 10% of California's 1000 school districts are “community funded,” also known as “Basic Aid.” MPCSD is one of these districts. This means we receive more in revenue from our local property taxes than the state would give us in per student funding. Average per student funding from state sources in California is $11,675 for elementary districts.

Community Funded districts DO NOT receive substantial money from the state; INSTEAD they get to keep the property tax revenues that their local jurisdiction allocates to them. MPCSD receives about 18 cents from every property tax dollar paid within MPCSD. Other entities like counties, cities, and special districts receive the remaining 82% of your property taxes.

Nearly 90% of the funding for our schools comes from within our district in the form of property taxes, parcel taxes, and philanthropic giving through our partner the Menlo Park-Atherton Education Foundation. Over 70% of MPCSD parents contribute to school funding in all these ways. In fact, last year the MPAEF increased its “ask” of parents for the first time in 10 years. Our parents are contributing greatly to our school funding.

What About Measure X?

In 2017 our community passed Measure X by nearly 80%! That level of support is in line with the traditionally strong support that parcel taxes have in our district. MPCSD has four parcel taxes, three of which are “evergreen” meaning they will not expire. Measure X, however, expires in 2024.

During the community conversation leading up to the overwhelming passage of Measure X, the School Board and District leadership clearly communicated that Measure X was a temporary solution to address long-standing financial needs, and that the fund from Measure X would provide a four year runway. In addition to Measure X, the district cut $2 million in spending.

The Spring of 2021 marks the end of the four year runway of financial stability that Measure X helped provide. Superintendent Burmeister will recommend a new election date of November 2021 for the replacement of Measure X to be placed on the ballot, a delay from the March 2021 date selected by the Board just prior to the COVID pandemic shut downs. This Measure X replacement will provide the district greater long-term financial stability.

What financial issues do we face? Increased enrollment over the past fifteen years coupled with the high cost of investing in an excellent teaching staff means our expenses are outpacing our revenue growth. Additionally, in 2020-21, the cost of hiring additional staff, extra cleaning measures, and PPE for the coronavirus pandemic has added nearly $3 million in expenses (about 38% of this is covered by one-time federal and state funds). Yes, property values have increased, but only sold or reassessed properties contribute to an increase in property taxes. And the district only receives 18% of the property taxes collected.

Why replace Measure X? Our schools are only as good as our educators. MPCSD spends 88% of its budget on the recruitment, retention, training, and compensation of our world-class staff. And staff means programs. We can’t have libraries without librarians, music, art, and world language classes without music, art, and world language teachers. We can’t maintain our smaller class sizes without the teachers to teach them. All the incredible qualities that make MPCSD what it is are only possible because of our staff. Without our parcel tax funding, we would cut staff and decrease our programs.

Assuming the MPCSD School Board approves the Superintendent’s recommendation for a November 2021 parcel tax election, the MPCSD community can expect to hear more in the coming months leading up to a campaign and election next fall. The campaign will be organized by our community members. If you are interested in preserving MPCSD’s excellent schools and the high property values they support, and would like to help pass our replacement parcel tax, please reach out to info@mpcsd.org. If you are interested in hearing more about the potential campaign, please attend any one of the Board’s many Board meetings this winter and spring.

Expenditures per Student by Source

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The passage of Measure X was in combination with $2 million in cuts made by the district over the period of 2017-2021. The revenue generated by Measure X allowed the district to avoid the most drastic of cuts while simultaneously planning for long-term financial stability. The district needs to weather growing enrollment in the future, the continued rising cost of recruiting and retaining excellent teachers, and the community’s expectation of robust, quality programs for all students. For good financial health, the district looks to many revenue streams and vision documents working together.

The **Vision for Outstanding Public Education** was created with input from community stakeholders including parents, residents, teachers, staff, and administrators. The Vision describes what MPCSD believes it—and all public districts—should provide their students, from the academic program to the composition of classrooms, community engagement and partnership, and services to serve the needs of all students.

The **Teacher Compensation Philosophy** states that MPCSD will pay its teachers a salary that honors their profession and allows them to live within a reasonable commute from MPCSD, despite MPCSD being located in one of the most expensive areas in the country to live. MPCSD is proud to pay its teachers some of the highest salaries among our neighboring districts and seeks to continue to do so even though our comparable districts rely less on parcel taxes and philanthropic giving to be able to do so.

The **One Community Campaign (OCC)** is the annual fundraising done on the district’s behalf by the Menlo Park-Atherton Education Foundation and our schools’ Parent-Teacher Organizations. This fundraising, supported by over 70% of district families, contributes about 7-8% of the district’s revenues. Without OCC funding, MPCSD would have larger classes, fewer teachers, and cut things like art, music, world language, and STEM labs from its program. It is our hope that over time, the One Community Campaign will grow to fund closer to 10% of the district’s operating budget.

Future Parcel Taxes and Bonds will be part of MPCSD’s long-term financial plans. Bonds are sought for building projects and it will be necessary within the next few years to reconstruct the gym, locker room, and kitchen facilities at Hillview to accommodate the growing number of students. Those buildings were not included in the 2010 rebuild of Hillview’s campus.

While Measure X must be replaced with a longer-term parcel tax to generate dependable revenues, it is MPCSD’s hope that we can steadily increase other funding streams and ask the community for parcel tax renewals on a less frequent basis.

The **Endowment 2030 Campaign** is a long-term effort by a diverse group of MPCSD stakeholders — current and alumni parents and grandparents, philanthropists, MPAEF Endowment advisors — to grow the current endowment to provide additional stable, reliable funding to MPCSD.

It will be through the combination of all these elements working together that MPCSD tackles and manages its financial challenges. MPCSD will again use its innovative thinking, collaborative spirit, and expert partners to solve the decades-old puzzle of how to consistently deliver a world-class education with a community-funded budget.
SEL program. Developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, RULER helps students, staff, and parents understand the value of emotions, build emotionally intelligent skills, and create and maintain a positive school climate. Dr. Marc Brackett, creator of RULER, is working with MPCSD and joined our Speaker Series this fall to discuss his book Permission to Feel. MPCSD recognizes the power of emotions and their crucial role in student and staff success, especially during this unusual year. As our Whole Child Learning & Development Framework outlines, students only succeed when they are supported by healthy and collaborative relationships throughout their school experience. MPCSD educates the whole child.

Commitment to Anti-racism

In June 2020, MPCSD's School Board adopted a resolution (available at www.mpcsd.org) committing to “Creating Anti-Racist Classrooms, Schools, and Communities.” The Board resolves to a careful examination of MPCSD’s institutional policies and practices, to reevaluating and reimagining how and what we teach, and to educating ourselves, our colleagues, and our students about systemic racism and white privilege so that we create an educational environment that promotes anti-racism.

MPCSD’s renowned Speaker Series is engaging in the community in a conversation about race. We will dedicate the month of January to a three-part series “Race, Prejudice & Policy: A Conversation on Segregation and its Legacy on Education around Menlo Park.” We will be joined by community leaders to look at the redlining policies that shaped housing development, demographics, and our school district populations; what the MPCSD experience may look like through the lens of a student of color; and education equity in the south peninsula. These conversations are hard but necessary. We invite you to learn more and join these events at www.mpcsdpeakersseries.com. We hope you will join us no matter your affiliation with MPCSD.

Superintendent Burmeister began an Anti-racism Advisory Team to help determine ways in which we can be actively anti-racist in our curriculum, actions, and policy. Over fifty parents and staff serve on the team and in working groups addressing Curriculum; Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention; Community & Parent Education; and Teacher/Staff Professional Development. If you have questions please reach out to info@mpcsd.org.

Read With Us...MPCSD is hosting book discussions about Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates, Caste by Isabel Wilkerson, The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein, How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi, Nice White Parents (Podcast), Real American by Julie Lythcott-Haims, So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo, Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds. Each book discussion will take place in January-March over Zoom, led by a MPCSD parent-staff member team. To join a club, please see the “Anti-racism Book Clubs” link on our district website under Quick Links.

MPCSD’s 2019-2020 Priorities

Pandemic Response

MPCSD was the first public school district in the Bay Area to reopen its schools after the spring COVID shut downs, beginning in September with kindergarteners, first graders and small groups of vulnerable learners. We are now open to all grades in an alternating week schedule with robust health and safety measures that are mitigating risk well. We have found that with options for parents and staff who are necessarily risk averse; clear Board leadership; teacher, staff, and union engagement in the process; and strong adherence to health and safety measures that are well communicated, schools can open safely. As a society, if we sacrifice to keep anything open during a pandemic, it should be our schools. Districts throughout San Mateo County are showing how that can be done.

MPCSD virtual Academy

MPCSD also offers a fully remote learning model called Virtual Academy. About 20% of our families have chosen to enroll in this option. Most districts are not able to offer two fully staffed and academically comparable models. It is thanks to the community’s support of parcel taxes and philanthropic giving that we have the organizational capacity to run the Virtual Academy concurrently with our Hybrid in-person model.

Social Emotional Learning

MPCSD has long provided meaningful curriculum for social emotional learning (SEL) in addition to cultivating an environment where all students and staff feel supported and empowered to achieve to the best of their abilities and interests. This year, MPCSD adds a powerful new resource, the RULER approach to understanding emotions, to its SEL program. Developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Development Framework outlines, students only succeed when they are supported by healthy and collaborative relationships throughout their school experience. MPCSD educates the whole child.

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Learning and Assessment in a Pandemic

With schools across the country suddenly switching to virtual learning in March, how to assess students became a question nationwide. California cancelled its annual Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) for 2020. This measures students’ competency in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math for grades 2-8, and Science in grades 5 and 8. Typically, MPCSD students score very highly, with 2019 data showing MPCSD students scoring 80.3 points above the standard in ELA, compared to the state average of 2.5 points below the standard. In Math, MPCSD students scored 74.9 points above the standard, compared to the state average of 33.5 points below the standard. Learn more at caschooldashboard.org.

With the Spring 2020 testing cancelled, MPCSD has continued to monitor student progress and achievement with local measures including Fountas & Pinnell, Scholastic Reading Inventory, and UCSD’s Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project. The results of these tests administered in Fall 2020 show where our students are as they returned to school. While we have noticed some learning loss in certain areas, it is hard to make direct comparisons since the school closures and remote learning changed the way assessments have been administered. MPCSD is committed to identifying students with loss of learning; creating site level intervention plans; implementing diagnostic & progress monitoring tools for reading & math; and focusing support staff on diagnosed areas of need. We are confident that we can make up for the lost learning and be on track for our students to once again exceed standards in regular assessments by the end of the school year 2020-21.

MPCSD Staff

MPCSD’s excellent professional staff serves the needs of our students and community. Over half of our teachers have advanced degrees, and many have taken the extra step of becoming nationally board certified in their area of expertise. Our specialist teachers, for library, art, world language, PE, and Special Education, are credentialed in their subjects and leaders in their fields. Investing in high quality educators and support staff is an MPCSD priority.

218 Teachers, 158 with Advanced Degrees, 13 with National Board Certification
3 Instructional Coaches
32 Instructional Aides
50 Paraeducators to support Special Education Students
18 Credentialed Administrators

5 School Psychologists
6 Counselors
1 Mental Health & Wellness Lead
2 District Nurse
4 LVNs

ELC Staff
7 Teachers
2 Aides

MPCSD Board of Education
Sherwin Chen, President
Scott Saywell, Vice President
David Ackerman
Stacey Jones
Francesca Segrè

District Leaders
Erik Burmeister, Superintendent
Jammie Behrendt, Assistant Superintendent
Community Engagement

MPCSD connects with its community in many ways. This year, hundreds of participants joined the over 30 School Board meetings held so far this year, as they are now held over Zoom. Remaining scheduled Board meetings for 2020-21 are Jan. 7, Feb. 11, Mar. 11, Apr. 15, May 13, Jun. 3, Jun. 10. Find agendas and Zoom links at www.mpcsd.org under Announcements 72 hours prior to each meeting.


We will return to the Menlo Park Farmers Market and our lunchtime town halls, Sup & Sandwich, as soon as possible.

Our Schools

Early Learning Center
88 Students, Ages 2.9-5
Engaging children through play, experimentation, friendship and perseverance to light the fire of lifelong learning.

Encinal Elementary School
195 Encinal Avenue, ATH
620 Students, Grades K-5
We educate, nurture, and inspire all voices to contribute to a better world.

Laurel Elementary School
Grades K-2: 95 Edge Road, ATH
Grades 3-5: 275 Elliott Drive, MP
735 Students, Grades K-5
We are confident students, passionate teachers, and an involved community.

Oak Knoll Elementary School
1895 Oak Knoll Lane, MP
675 Students, Grades K-5
We educate, nurture, and inspire all voices to contribute to a better world.

Hillview Middle School
1100 Elder Avenue, MP
975 Students, Grades 6-8
Inspiring and empowering students to be resilient problem solvers, compassionate contributors, and lifelong learners.

To find out which elementary school serves your home address, search for “School Locator” on our website, www.mpcsd.org. All students in grades 6-8 attend Hillview Middle School.

Photo credits: Laurel PTO, Marc Brackett, MPCSD, Stacy Matsuura