We want to thank everyone who participated in our first district-wide Town Hall Meeting of the 2017-18 school year on Monday, Sept. 25th, at Willow Glen High. More than 150 parents, staff, students, elected officials, and community members joined us to provide feedback, voice concerns, and ask important questions about the district, our schools, and our focus in the months and years ahead.

We have done our best to synthesize all of your questions and comments and provide responses here. Please send any follow-up questions to our Public Information Office at pio@sjusd.org.

Curriculum & Instruction

What innovative ideas will you employ to address the needs of all students and elevate opportunities for student groups not achieving at a level equal to their peers?

The instructional day is designed to support students with varied learning needs and abilities. The instructional framework focuses on direct instruction of grade level standards, followed by collaborative practice and differentiation aligned to the unique needs of our students. Our lower primary (K-2) teachers are implementing Guided Reading, which provides students with daily opportunities to collaboratively apply their learning. Students have access to various adaptive online programs in reading and math that support students with instructional needs, as well as those who can accelerate beyond their grade level.

Upper elementary teachers (grades 3-5) utilize an online reading program that adjusts the reading level to each student’s instructional level while reading the same social studies or science content. San José Unified staffs all elementary schools with one or more Intervention Specialists, who are highly trained in various methods of teaching literacy skills targeting phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading comprehension.

Middle school students may access additional support through English and math support classes. These classes use the district’s adaptive programs to provide individualized intervention as well as a companion text, which provides students experience with the skills that will be addressed in their grade level English or math class.

All San José Unified high schools offer a daily advisory period, during which a student may attend help sessions with any of their teachers as well as other site staff. Many of our teachers also offer after-school support, including teachers of Advanced Placement courses.

What is being done at the local level to help students compete at the global level, particularly in tech?

Our curriculum focuses on writing and communication, which are important skills both inside and outside the classroom. We encourage the use of technology and tools – such as Google Classroom – that support communication, differentiation, and academic interactions student-to-student as well as
student-to-teacher. Our middle schools are currently piloting several new computer science courses, and Burnett Middle has entered into a partnership with the San José Tech Museum. Our high schools offer a course sequence that provides experience with skills spanning basic computer science through advanced coding. Because we live in an increasingly global society, San José Unified also supports biliteracy through Two-Way Bilingual Immersion (TWBI) and Spanish Native Speaker programs.

**Does San José Unified offer gifted programs for students with disabilities?**

San José Unified’s strategic plan emphasizes the need to accelerate student learning and provide all students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. While not all GATE-identified students are achieving above grade level, GATE assessments show if a student has strong skills in problem solving. Our teachers have been trained and are expected to provide instruction using a variety of strategies that differentiate curriculum in order to meet the needs of each student in ways that challenge their thinking and talents within the classroom — in both general education and special education. Students who are academically prepared may earn high school credit for both math and world language while in middle school. San José Unified offers more Advanced Placement courses than most other local high schools. Our schools support open enrollment in these courses, which serve to prepare our students for the rigors of both college and career.

**Students and teachers have reported a lack of materials to support their curriculum.**

Schools submit requests for materials through our textbook inventory system, and our warehouse delivers materials to the schools. Any classrooms that do not have enough materials may submit requests through this system, and additional materials are ordered immediately.

**Teachers are assigning too much homework. / School should be more fun for students.**

We are currently reviewing district homework policies to make sure that our practice supports our priorities and aligns to current research. We believe that homework should be aligned to instruction, and that students should be able to complete it without adult support.

**Class sizes are too large, especially in our elementary schools.**

Research is clear that small class sizes (12-14 students per class) coupled with individualized instruction can be highly effective in improving student learning. Unfortunately, these class sizes are not possible given the funding structure in California for public education. However, our elementary classes do engage in small group instruction, which can achieve very similar results. Our elementary teachers use a Guided Reading approach, which provides students with instruction in groups of three to four (3-4), targeted to their academic needs. Our adaptive programs support the classroom teacher with grouping structures and lessons to build on students’ strengths while targeting areas of need.
English Learner students should be immersed in English-only classes at the earliest level.

Research shows that English Learners learn best when supported in their primary language. We value bilingualism and biliteracy and do not believe students benefit from a “sink or swim” model. Rather, Spanish-speaking secondary students (grades 6-12) who are new to this country receive all instruction in English while continuing to develop literacy skills in their primary language through the Spanish Native Speaker program.

The district needs a textbook library or depository.

All of San José Unified’s books are housed in campus libraries or textbook rooms. In addition to this, we have a warehouse that holds extra textbooks, which are delivered to school sites by request.

The district needs more classes and instruction in typing skills.

Students have many opportunities during the school day to use computers in order to practice keyboarding. Schools also have the option of purchasing a district-approved keyboarding program. Students who wish to further develop keyboarding skills may also access many free online programs.

The district needs more computer programming courses.

Please see our response above regarding global competitiveness. We have several schools that offer computer science and/or programming classes, clubs, and activities, and we are constantly looking to expand these offerings.

What is the district’s position on state legislation calling for middle and high school classes to start no earlier than 8:30am?

The district opposed this legislation because we believe decisions about school start times should be made at the local level. We are exploring the issue as it relates to our district and individual schools.

Special Education

What is the timeline for a Special Education referral?

Please refer to our website for more information: go.sjusd.org/sped

The district is currently without a Director of Special Education. Are there plans to fill this position?

The position of Special Education Director calls for an individual with both technical knowledge and skill as well as strength in leadership and management. Our recruitment efforts to this point have not identified such a person. We plan to post the position again in the late winter, when educators begin to consider changes for the following year. We are also exploring other recruitment methods to widen our net. In the meantime, the Special Education Department receives support from directors in related
departments (e.g. Curriculum & Instruction). Additionally, we are working with outside consultants to streamline processes, increase efficiencies, and improve our responsiveness to staff and families.

How can the district expand Special Education inclusion classes?
San José Unified offers inclusive programs at every school site where this type of setting provides the most appropriate education. The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) calls for students who receive special education services to be placed in what is referred to as the “least restrictive environment” (LRE). This means students with special needs should spend as much time as possible with students who are not receiving special education services. In San José Unified, inclusive classes have special education teachers “push in” at specific times during the day to teach — instead of pulling kids out of class to a separate room. Special education students are included for the maximum time allowed while still ensuring that they are able to access the curriculum and master the content. If a student’s disability requires more intensive support, their IEP team will determine to what extent the student will need a more restrictive environment to maximize their learning.

The district needs more Special Education staff and teacher aides.
We agree. We are constantly recruiting special education teachers, school psychologists, and speech and language instructors. Unfortunately, there is a severe shortage of available talent in each of these areas, and we are not the only district in need. We are currently encouraging many of our talented Instructional Associates to pursue their teaching credentials through grant funds made available by the Santa Clara County Office of Education. Additionally, we have reduced our number of contracted classroom staff and will begin hiring for the 2018-19 school year in early January.

Parents should be allowed to participate in Special Education classrooms to assist teachers.
Our schools welcome all family and community members as volunteers to support staff and students. Please visit go.sjusd.org/volunteer to learn more about the process and complete an application. You can also contact your school to inquire about the opportunities they offer.

Family Engagement
The district needs more parents involved in their children’s education.
Many district employees are also parents, and we understand the challenges parents face. We are very grateful to the parents and family members who take the time out of their busy schedules to support the district and our schools by serving on committees, organizing fundraisers, volunteering in school offices, and more. We encourage each of you to reach out to parents in your networks to encourage them to engage with us as their schedules allow. You can visit our website to learn more about the opportunities available: go.sjusd.org/parents
I did not feel welcome as a volunteer at my student’s school.

One of our top priorities is keeping our schools safe and welcoming environments for all. If you have any concerns, please contact our Family Engagement Department at (408) 535-6404 ext. 14324.

How can the district take advantage of its diversity?

San José Unified is proud to be the most diverse school district in Santa Clara County, with 30,000 students and their families collectively speaking 46 different languages. We promote an environment of inclusion, respect, and understanding at all levels of our organization. Preserving and celebrating our unique cultural identities is a critical element of preparing students to succeed in an increasingly global society.

Student Services

What mental health and/or wellness services are available in the district?

Each of our campuses offers a minimum of three (3) hours of daily social emotional/mental health counseling from partnering agencies. This may include individual and/or group counseling. In addition, many of our elementary school campuses use Student Support Counselors to work with truant and other at-risk students to help re-engage them in their education.

In addition, the district utilizes up to $500,000 in annual Medi-Cal reimbursements to supplement existing mental health services, provide structured recess and lunchtime activities, and channel resources to our neediest students and families. PBIS (Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports) programs are utilized in 32 of our 41 schools to improve campus culture and create a caring environment that rewards positive behavior.

In 2006, San José Unified’s Board of Education adopted a Wellness Policy, recognizing that a healthy lifestyle leads to better engagement in student learning. As a result, unhealthy snacks, meals and drinks have been eliminated from our school sites and district office. Each campus chooses how to best implement the Wellness Policy, and many do so through the use of site wellness committees.

The district should foster clubs to introduce career tracks to high school seniors.

While the Student Services Department doesn't work directly with campus clubs, we have acted as a resource to provide more information for campus groups about how to combat bullying, suicide prevention, student nutrition, and other physical and mental health-related topics. We encourage you to talk to your high school administrator about forming a career-oriented club.
Transportation

The district should offer more early pick-up and late drop-off times.

Our Transportation Department provides Zero Period transportation for certain high schools and Activity bus service for middle schools. The department does not currently have the resources to provide other early services.

The district should provide more transportation for athletic teams.

We provide school buses for athletic events as they are available before or after standard home-to-school routes. If buses are not available, we can make arrangements with a charter company to get the students to their event at the desired time. Once a school makes a request, we will work with the school to accommodate the trip.

Human Resources

The district should focus on teacher retention as well as recruitment.

We agree. In fact, one of the focus objectives of our new strategic plan is to annually retain 95% of high-performing employees through professional development opportunities, improved compensation packages, and other supports.

The district should improve substitute pay to compete with other districts.

Earlier this year, San José Unified updated its pay rates for substitutes. We now have three daily pay rates: $135 for daily jobs; $150 for difficult-to-fill and long-term roles; and $200 for substitutes who accept and are authorized to remain in long-term assignments indefinitely. To qualify for the $200 rate, substitute teachers must have the appropriate credential or TPSL (Teaching Permit for Statutory Leave) and commit to covering the entire long-term vacancy or leave.

Web/Communications

WiFi bandwidth/access needs to be improved at district high schools.

All district-issued devices are automatically enrolled on the San José Unified WiFi network, which provides more than adequate bandwidth for education-related uses by staff and students. While that bandwidth can be limited during online assessments, the network is robust enough to provide Internet access for all who need it. Additionally, staff and students may access our Guest network using their personal devices. While the bandwidth of that network is not as robust, it is designed to augment and not replace the district WiFi network. We are currently visiting our high school sites to assess recent changes to our WiFi network and identify potential improvements.
Many parents cannot attend district meetings in person due to their busy schedules. Does the district plan to live stream and/or post archived video and/or audio of its meetings online?

We are currently in the process of adding an audio archive of Board of Education meetings to our website and are exploring the possibility of video streaming and/or recording all public meetings when a quorum of Board Members is present.

Thanks to all who submitted questions, comments, and suggestions. The conversation will continue at our next district-wide Town Hall Meeting on Monday, February 5th, from 6-8pm at Leland High School.