

Support SMMEF to enrich schools

Jessie Alexander

Thanks to the district-wide fundraising by Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation (SMMEF), John Muir students and teachers have a breath of fresh air at our school: Classrooms are now staffed by Teacher and Aide; Teachers receive on-going professional training; and students receive specialized support in reading.

The 2014-15 school year is the first roll-out of improved programs district wide, after many years of planning, voting and fundraising. Tangible examples of the success of the program abound as we begin the second semester: integration of education and technology at each grade level; year-round Visual Arts and Music, as well as an introduction to Dance for upper grades.

And finally, we have an infusion of science instruction for our elementary students. Scientific hypotheses and experiments push critical thinking and analysis — no matter what the result — a key component of the new Common Core Standards. From Kindergarten through 5th grade, John Muir kids are enthralled. They share stories at home, and literally, the next day parents get involved as volunteers.

All of these new elements present in our school environment have inspired teachers and families, representing an improved consensus to participate towards one common goal: consistent and high quality education for every child. The district-wide and focused fundraising and support by the Education Foundation for all SMMUSD schools complements the push by faculty, students, and administrators, to bring out the best in each classroom and to keep the momentum to ensure these programs are the new standard for the future.

As community leaders, our PTA is committed to educating parents about the positive impact the district programs are having on their students' education and how their donations to SMMEF make it all possible. Each school is more connected now. Even among our PTA's, we are working together to support each other and SMMEF.

Public education is not competitive in the market sense — yet the diverse and changing dynamic of each school site and district, asks us to perform competitively. We, as a community, are responsible for our excellence. The shift is palpable, and the required effort and commitment to make it happen at each level — state, city, district and school community — is clear too.

Education is a long-term investment and plays a key role to improving individual lives and our society as a whole. I am new to Santa Monica — our family moved here in 2012 — and with two children, the schools have been my “window” to understanding the local community. I am very happy with what I see: a friendly, diverse community supporting an enriched curriculum. As a parent, small business owner, PTA member and resident, my experience is that “we” are creating equity of opportunity for all students across the District, and we are raising the quality and standards of our educational system at the same time. As the saying goes in Spanish, “la union hace la fuerza” — together we are stronger.

I appreciate our neighborhood public schools, and recognize the continued efforts of the District, the Board of Education and SMMEF to support these new programs. I am also grateful to live in a place where the entire community contributes to a better future for all children.

Jessie Alexander is the PTA president at John Muir Elementary School.

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