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STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

It is a delight to welcome you to the new school year in Vista Unified. Our theme for the year is “Students at the Center.”

The vision of Vista Unified is to be the model of educational excellence and innovation. Our central commitment as an organization is to provide an inspiring learning environment that is safe, secure and focused on language, literacy and numeracy. During the 2017-18 school year, we will be deepening this commitment by setting the conditions for learning to be more personalized to the individual strengths, interests and needs of each student. Over the past 27 years as an educator in Vista, I have always been inspired by the excitement and dedication students show about learning when teachers, staff and parents work as a team to support students along their learning pathway. This strengths-based approach to learning has the power to ignite the joy of learning for all children. Our charge as a team this year (parents, teachers, staff and administrators) is to expand strength-based learning by keeping “students at the center” of our collective efforts. Please join me in making this year a joyful learning experience for all students.

As we all prepare to jump into a new year, please keep in mind that our collective work, while complex at times, can really be summed up in three broad brushstrokes: early education, personal learning and relevant connections to the world of work - Early, Personal and Relevant! These three brushstrokes are simple but powerful drivers towards a transformed learning experience.

Brushstroke 1: Early

Early education means that we are constantly looking for opportunities to support and even expand learning for students during the most formative growth years. Learning a language and building a foundation for literacy starts early on in a child’s life. Vista Unified has launched a [P-3 Continuum](#) (Prenatal to Grade 3) that will provide a broad base of supports for students (even before they are born) across a wide range of services that wrap around the student and family to ensure they have what they need to become a successful learner. Teachers can now begin to lean on others to support their role as the experts in language, literacy and numeracy. This type of expansive service is possible now due to nine years of work with our partners in the early childhood community including Educational Enrichment Services, San Diego County Office of Education and the United Way. Together we form The Vista Partnership for Children. The Vista Partnership is now able to align a robust set of services in the Vista community to have a collective impact on promoting the physical, social, emotional and academic development of students starting before they are born. Using a collective impact model will serve to close the achievement gap before it opens.

Brushstroke 2: Personal

[Personal learning](#) means that we are refining our instructional focus as a school district to set the conditions for students to really grab ahold of their learning and engage in more authentic ways; enabling them to leverage their strengths and interests while accessing grade level standards. This shift expands the role of the teacher from a content expert to a learning activator, promoting greater levels of co-creation of learning activities with students. Students will have increasingly more opportunities to become drivers of their own learning as they move up through the grade levels. As students gain more stewardship of their own learning, they increase opportunities for collaboration and self discovery. When students feel a sense of ownership of their learning, parents, teachers and staff begin to see them open up and show their full capacity as learners.

Brushstroke 3: Relevant

Relevant connections to the world of work means that students, across all grade levels, can really dig into experiencing careers in the developing priority sectors of the San Diego County economy. San Diego has been recognized as a “Smart City” around the globe with work sectors that are growing faster than anywhere else in country. For example, work sectors like Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy, Health Care, Information & Communication Technology and Life Sciences have a lattice of careers available for students to learn about and explore using our [Service Learning](#) program at the elementary schools, [Talent Cities](#) model at the middle school level and the [Career and Technical Education](#) pathways at the high school level. All of our schools are expanding opportunities for students to get a jump start on learning about the world of work through a variety of STEM Labs and makerspaces that provide hands-on activities for students of all ages. Students are more engaged in school when learning becomes hands-on and relevant to the real world.

Vista Unified has created a fantastic learning environment for students. It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I welcome you back to a new school year. As a team, We Are Vista Every Day!