



Press Release  
11/30/2023

Update from San Juan Island School District Superintendent

The holidays are upon us. Thanksgiving has come and gone, and now in just two more weeks, students and staff will leave the campuses to enjoy a much-deserved break. At SJISD, we wish you the best of the season.

As a new year quickly approaches, it is important to look back at what has been achieved. At SJISD, there is much to celebrate. We are pleased with the great strides being made academically and socially. Favorite school traditions have been reinstated like the elementary school Halloween Parade, homecoming, fall field trips, and full sports schedules. The progress seen in the classroom is a tribute to the resilience and commitment of parents, students, staff, and faculty that makes all of the district proud.

In the 2019-20 school year, the middle school instituted a program called AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) recognizing that students would benefit from additional support in accessing, internalizing, and retaining information. Teachers are trained in specific strategies to help students become more organized, study information with purpose, and become self-advocates. AVID encourages students to accelerate learning, deal with challenges, and stretch their intellectual curiosity. We are beginning to see the results of this work as students demonstrate meaningful note-taking and mature collaborative presentations that prepare each student for life in the 21st century.

While AVID itself is impressive, such programs are only as good as those who teach it. Its success in our District is a testament to the amazing staff at all our schools who are devoted to the children and committed to excellence. From kindergarten to high school, in the traditional school or at the alternative setting at Griffin Bay, students from this island, and some from other locations in this State, are being challenged, supported, recognized, and provided with a safe space.

A recent anecdote encapsulates all the above. In early November, the visiting president of the Colorado School of Mines spoke with aspiring STEM field students. At the end of the question-and-answer session, he remarked how impressed he was with that dialogue and how engaged all were in the

presentation. This is a testament to our schools, students, and supportive community. We are proud that our students have opportunities for conversations like this. We might be a small school, rural by definition, but we look beyond the limitations to determine how we can accomplish what is needed.

One limitation we recognize both nationally and in our own community is the shortage of preschool centers which are so important for preparing children socially, intellectually, and emotionally for their educational journey. Therefore, in October the board of directors approved a resolution to move forward with the opening of our first Transition to Kindergarten (TK) school in the fall of 2024. In the interim, there is much to be done before this can become a reality. Facilities constraints and State expectations will limit enrollment. Therefore, a screening process will be used to determine who can and will be admitted. In addition, we want to work closely with the private sector preschools to ensure every child has an opportunity to attend pre-k programs. More information will be coming out in the new year. I can say with confidence that a good preschool experience sets students up for greater achievement during the remainder of their time in school.

With a clear understanding of what we have done and what we need to do, on November 29, the school board of directors approved a resolution to submit a levy for your approval in the February elections. This is not new but rather an extension of the capital and technology levy you approved in 2020. These requests are never taken lightly, and the steering committee and the directors have spent considerable time framing what will be on the ballot with thoughtfulness and sensitivity. The voters on our Island have consistently supported our schools, and for that I am grateful. Please be assured that we have worked diligently to be good stewards of the funds provided to enhance the facilities as well as maintain up-to-date technological opportunities for our students.

Some of the projects we have completed since 2020 are rebuilding the aging tennis courts, creating a new art room in the STEM building in response to requests to move from STEM to STEA(arts)M, modernizing the sprinkler system and roof of the middle school, and remodeling the high school science room. We pride ourselves in having done all this and more while soaring inflation impacted the estimated costs determined in 2020.

The school board believes that the new levy request balances rising costs with the need to avoid a huge tax burden. The mil rate is lower, but of course, with continued escalation in home valuations, the total cost is unavoidably slightly higher. The increase is minimal. For example, the tax

increase on a home assessed at \$800,000, will be less than \$4 per month. Although this is a small amount individually, it will have a huge positive impact on our schools.

There are several items of this levy proposal that are desperately needed, including:

- Repairing and replacing the siding at the secondary campus before there is further deterioration.
- Replacing the aging 30-year-old carpet in the elementary school.
- Replacing various inefficient water heaters and boiler systems.
- Maintaining modernized technological services in a rapidly changing environment.

These are just a few of the projects that will improve safety, conserve energy, or provide important preventative maintenance at our schools.

It is important to note that we continue to seek financial support through grants for capital projects and programs as well as continuing to work alone and in collaboration with other districts to secure fairer funding from the State. We respect the island voters and appreciate your willingness to support our schools in the past, but we also recognize that we must do our part to secure other funding from the State level.

So, there is much going on in this district. We remain proud of who we are and hope to continue to meet the demands of modern society and provide the best education delivered by the best educators. To do this, I will continue to reach out to our legislators with the message that it is important to review the current regionalization structure that is not fairly allocated in comparison to our high cost of living. To recruit and retain quality staff, we must pay a livable wage.

I am in my seventeenth year in this district. I raised my children here. I couldn't be prouder of that fact. In my travels this past year I saw a sign driving into a community welcoming visitors. The tagline in bold letters was **GREAT COMMUNITY, GREAT SCHOOLS**. We will continue to strive to be no less than this.

Fred Woods  
Superintendent  
San Juan Island School District