

2021-22 School Year Begins August 4

Following a year and a half of mostly distance learning, Palm Springs Unified School District opens the 2021-22 school year on Wednesday, Aug. 4 with full in-person instruction and traditional schedules. All students are expected to report to classes on that day.

As the region, state and nation are continuing to navigate through the remnants of the COVID-19 pandemic and since vaccinations are not yet available for children under the age of 12, the District will continue to adhere to public health guidelines to ensure staff and student safety including the requirement for wearing face coverings while indoors on any school site. In addition, classroom set-ups will be modified in order to maintain three feet of distance between students wherever possible.

During the school shutdown and continuing over the summer, PSUSD's Nutrition Services Department has been providing curbside meal service in addition to grab and go meals for students enrolled in summer programs. The curbside program concludes on July 30, and regular meal service begins on Wednesday with some modifications in adherence with safety protocols including increased cleaning between meal periods and student hand washing before and after meal service.

Breakfast will be served in school multi-purpose rooms, classrooms or "Grab and Go" as students enter campuses, and pre-plated or "Grab and Go" supper will be offered at most schools during after-school programs. Parents should check with individual school sites for specific meal service options.

While PSUSD serves all meals to students at no cost, and families are not required to complete meal applications in order to receive free meals, families who do not receive state benefits will be asked to complete the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) Alternate Income Form, which will be sent to households in September.

"This form helps the District receive the maximum amount of funding for your students' classrooms," said Director of Nutrition Services Stephanie Bruce. "This form is simple to complete and only requires general information including parent name and signature, enrolled student name and student ID/birthdate, number of people in the household and range of income. This form is electronic and takes less than a minute to complete."

Parents of students who are eligible for bus transportation will be receiving a letter with assigned bus stops this week. If you believe that your child is eligible for transportation and do not receive a letter by Aug. 2, call (760) 325-8774.

All Palm Springs Unified School District students entering the 7th grade this school year, and all new PSUSD students entering 7th through 12th grade, must show proof of an adolescent whooping cough booster (called "Tdap") to attend school. District officials are asking that students be immunized as soon as possible and present proof of immunization at their school site immediately.

The state Legislature passed a law that went into effect on Jan. 1, 2016, that all students, other than those with a medical waiver signed by a physician, are required to be fully immunized in order to attend school. Students who are not in compliance are required to enroll in an independent study or home-schooling program in order to receive a public-school education.

Borrego Health will provide free Tdap shots will be available by appointment on Wednesday, July 28 from 7:30 to 11 a.m. at North Gate Community Church on Date Palm Drive in Cathedral City and Friday, July 30 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Desert Springs Middle School in Desert Hot Springs. School enrollment and sports physicals will also be offered at this time.

For more information on immunization requirements, contact your individual school site or the District Office at (760) 883-2703, ext.4805105.

PSUSD Announces Administrative Changes for New School Year



Dr. Mike Swize



Dr. Simone Kovats



Mark Arnold



Laura Meusel



Jessica Whiteman



Brenda Santana



Dr. Nicole Crawford



Tommi Jones



Dr. Deanna Keullian

As the Palm Springs Unified School District prepares to commence the 2021-22 school year with full in-person instruction and traditional schedules following a year and a half of distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many new certificated administrators have joined the District family while others have changed positions during this time.

The District's new Superintendent of Schools **Dr. Mike Swize** officially began his new post on July 1 following the retirement of Dr. Sandra Lyon. Swize began his career in education in PSUSD 31 years ago and has served as a teacher, director, assistant principal, principal and most recently the Assistant Supt. of Educational Services for the past 11 years.

Dr. Simone Kovats, who joined PSUSD in 2009 as the principal of Della S. Lindley Elementary and served as Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction for four years, is now the District's Assistant Supt. of Educational Services.

Mark Arnold, who came to PSUSD as the Principal of Katherine Finchy Elementary in 2008 and also served as Principal of Cabot Yerxa

Elementary before becoming Director of State and Federal Programs in 2017 is now PSUSD's Executive Director of Student Learning.

Laura Meusel has joined PSUSD as Executive Director of Student Services, replacing Dr. Anne Kalisek, who retired last month. Muesel formerly served as a District administrator in the Oak Grove School District in San Jose.

Jessica Whiteman, who previously served as Principal of Cathedral City Elementary (CCE) since 2009, is now Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction. She started her career in 2001 as a teacher and also served as an assistant principal at Two Bunch Palms Elementary. CCE's new Principal is **Brenda Santana**, who joined PSUSD as a teacher in 2002 and served as assistant principal at James Workman and Nellie Coffman Middle Schools and Cathedral City Elementary.

Don Slusser, a retired PSUSD administrator, is serving as the interim Principal of Della S. Lindley Elementary, following the resignation of Amy Zink, who is now a principal in the Desert Sands Unified School District.

PSUSD's new Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction is **Dr. Deanna Keullian**. Keullian joined PSUSD in 2019 as the District's Director of College and Career Readiness and Linked Learning & Career Technical Education.

Dr. Nicole Crawford has come to PSUSD as its first Coordinator of Diversity and Racial Equity after serving as an English teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Dr. Sonya Scott, who previously served as an Administrator on Special Assignment in San Jacinto Unified, became PSUSD's Coordinator of Special Education – Related Services after **Xochitl Perez** was promoted to the Coordinator of PSUSD's Mental Health Department last December.

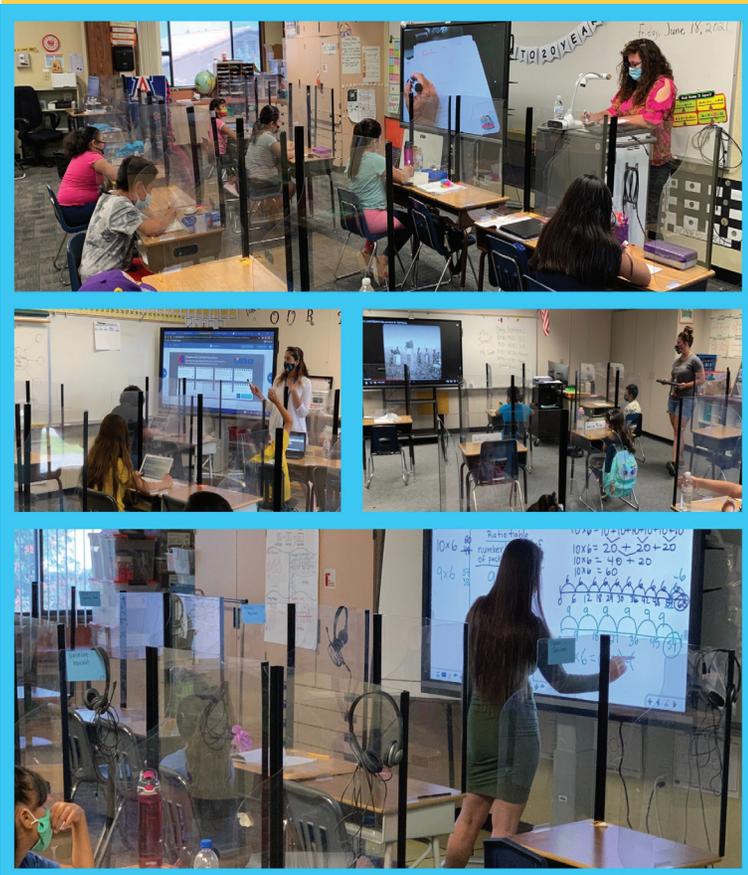
Others who joined PSUSD during the 2020-21 school year included: Psychologists **Kathleen King** and **Erika Sanchez**, Occupational Therapist **Adrianna Martin** and Painted Hills Middle School Assistant Principal **Bethany Pearson**. Administrators who changed positions during last school year include **Eduardo Rivera**, who is now PSUSD's coordinator of online learning; and **Jodi Curtis**, who is now the District's Assistant Director of Special Education.

Veronica Lopez is a new PSUSD Psychologist from Riverside USD, and former teacher **Tommi Jones** is Raymond Cree Middle School's new Assistant Principal.

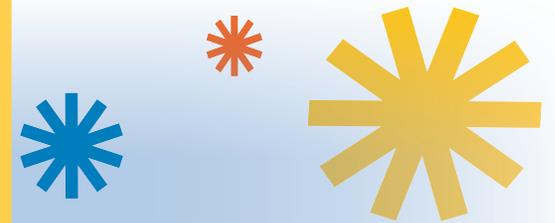


Robust Summer Programs at All Levels

While summer learning opportunities have always been a part of District programming for high school students for credit recovery to stay on track for graduation, this summer provided many programs (both in person and online) for students at every level from pre-school through 12th grade in an effort to help close learning gaps following over a year and a half of no in-person instruction due to COVID-19 restrictions. Pictured left, top and bottom is a sampling of some of the summer activity including instruction at Bubbling Wells, Julius Corsini and Cabot Yerxa Elementary Schools; visits by Supt. of Schools Dr. Mike Swize and Assistant Supt. of Educational Services Dr. Simone Kovats to various sites including Desert Hot Springs High (below right with Assistant Principal Sean Pendergraph) and combined Painted Hills and Desert Springs Middle School program at Desert Springs (with Desert Springs Principal Omar Tinoco and some students above).



Riverside County Teacher of the Year: Cielo Vista Charter teacher Nichi Aviña was selected last spring as one of four 2021-22 Riverside County Teachers of the Year after being chosen as one of PSUSD's three District Teachers of the Year along with James Workman Middle School teacher Shane Frakes and Cahuilla Elementary teacher Dana Zahler. Aviña is now vying for California Teacher of the Year honors.



District Digest



Getting Ready for Kindergarten:

Incoming PSUSD kindergarten and transitional kindergarten students and their parents enjoyed STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) activities at this summer's Kindy Camp, hosted by the District's Family Engagement Center.



Congressman Ruiz Visits with PSUSD Staff, Community Members:

Congressman Dr. Raul Ruiz, fourth from right, took time to visit with PSUSD staff and community members at the recent Juneteenth celebration at the James O. Jesse Highland Community Center.



Palm Springs High Athletes Win County Academic High Honors:

At a recent Board of Education meeting Kevin Goodley, a coordinator with the Riverside County Office of Education Leadership, Innovation and Outreach division, fifth from left, presented Palm Springs High School's boys' water polo and girls track teams with Academic Athletic Team Awards for attaining the highest county GPAs in their respective sports. The teams' coaches, along with Principal Brian Hendra and Assistant Principal Janelle Hunt, accepted the award.



Foundation Awards \$106K in Scholarships: The Foundation for the Palm Springs Unified School District distributed a total of \$106,000 to 56 District seniors through 12 scholarship accounts it administers with individual awards ranging from \$500 to \$10,000. Nine students shared a total of \$25,000 from the Georgia Fogelson scholarship fund. Pictured above are eight of the winners of the Fogelson scholarship with Jerry Fogelson, who established the fund in his late wife's memory.



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This Palm Springs Unified School District report to the community is published bimonthly by the Palm Springs Unified School District.
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PSUSD Foundation Focus on Mental Health, Instruments, STEM for 2021-22

The Foundation for the Palm Springs Unified School District raises funds for a range of PSUSD programs and projects not covered in school or District budgets. Led by Director Ellen Goodman with the support and guidance of a volunteer Board of Directors, the 501(c)3 Foundation will be focusing efforts on raising funds in the areas of mental health, musical instruments and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) during the 2021-22 school year along with its other annual initiatives.

The Foundation is actively raising funds for the establishment of On-Campus Wellness Centers aimed at providing safe-space retreats and private spaces for counseling students through emotional or mental health challenges during the school day. The need is heightened at this time since many students are combatting COVID-19 aftermath struggles. According to the “Children’s Mental Health



Foundation President Mark Gauthier congratulates this year's 18 SMART graduates at the May celebration at the PS Air Museum.

Report,” young people with access to mental health treatment and services in school are 10 times more likely to seek help for mental health and substance abuse concerns than those who do not have such programs available.

Musical Instruments fundraising will focus on the goal of providing recorders, ukuleles, and keyboards for each 3rd, 4th, and 5th grader in the District in recognition of the important skill-building in all areas, including mathematics, that individual musical instruction provides. Post-COVID, it is important that students not share equipment, but have their own dedicated instruments.

STEM labs and “makerspaces” in our district’s schools provide hands-on experiences in new and emerging digital technologies – including work with robotics, drones, 3-D printers, e-Sports, and cyber security activities. With this kind of learning so important in the future work force, the Foundation will be raising funds to establish STEM labs at District schools.

The Foundation will also continue its cornerstone Classroom Grants program, which provides funding directly to teachers for projects that they originate and execute. The SMART (Student Mentoring and Resource Training) initiatives matches community volunteers targeted students to counsel

them through the college-application and financial-aid application process. The Foundation-established JASI (Jerry Argovitz Sports Institute) program helps student athletes navigate many of the hurdles they encounter. The Foundation also oversees distribution of significant scholarship monies each year to those students going on to higher education.

The Foundation also plans to expand its Board of Directors. Comprised of community leaders with various backgrounds, all share the commitment to support public education. To learn more about Board Membership, or support of The Foundation’s efforts via individual donation, planned giving, or corporate involvement, contact Ellen Goodman at (415) 632-2925, or via email at egoodman@psusd.us.



Foundation Director Ellen Goodman, second from left, congratulates SMART graduate Madison Eves. Also pictured are Madison’s parents Lupi and Russell Eves.

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Welcome to the 2021-22 School Year



It is my honor and pleasure to welcome all our students, staff, families and community members to the 2021-22 school year as your new Superintendent of Schools. I look forward to a productive year ahead as well as the opportunity to work with all of you to move forward in our quest for academic, social and emotional success for each of our Palm Springs Unified School District students.

Needless to say, the past year and a half has been everything but “normal” or “traditional.” It has, without a doubt, been the most challenging times most of us have ever experienced in so many ways, not the least of which has been continuing the education of our children without being able to interact with them in person. I could not be prouder of and impressed with the perseverance and creativity of our students and staff members as they navigated through uncharted waters of distance learning and the challenges that came with it. We are also so grateful for the extensive support from our families and community members during this unique and, for many, turbulent time.

We are encouraged by the most recent reports which show continued decreases in cases and positivity rates as well as the numbers of local residents who have taken the COVID-19 vaccines. The more people vaccinated; the less likely outbreaks will occur as we launch the 2021-22 school year next week (August 4). We anticipate a return to our traditional classroom settings and schedules, though there could be revised guidelines

at the state or county level that could change that, and we will be ready to respond accordingly if that happens. As we begin the school year, all students and staff will be required to wear face coverings indoors at all school sites, and we will distance classroom desks three feet apart wherever possible.

As I begin my 32nd year in education, I am excited to be doing that in the school district that I have called home for all of that time. I have served as a teacher, coordinator, assistant principal, principal, director and, most recently assistant superintendent of educational services for the past 11 years. It is my great honor to continue to serve this district in the role of Superintendent, I am extremely positive and excited about the future in Palm Springs Unified School District. That is due in large part to the amazing Board of Education, Cabinet, Leadership Team, teachers and entire staff that are second to none in terms of their commitment and dedication to doing what is best for our students. I could not ask for a finer team, and I know that together we will continue the innovative work our district has become known for and move even further forward in our focus on creating a culture focused on anti-racism, equity and growth opportunities and supports for each one of our students.

I hope you all enjoy the final week of summer break, and I hope you will not hesitate to reach out to me at mswize@psusd.us at any time if you have suggestions, input or questions on how we can work together to best support your children.

Sincerely,

Mike Swize, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools