

**A PATH FORWARD** Steven P. Dinkin

# IN THE RUSH TO NORMAL, WE CAN'T LEAVE THE KIDS BEHIND

Along with birthdays and anniversaries, our calendars are filled with special days, weeks and months, many designated by presidential proclamation. These observances raise awareness of an issue, commemorate an event, or celebrate ethnic and historically marginalized groups.

March is Women's History Month. It's also National Colon Cancer Awareness Month and Irish American Heritage Month, coinciding with St. Patrick's Day.

I wonder if down the road, March will become COVID-19 Remembrance Month. It's when we mark the anniversary of the World Health Organization's pandemic declaration (March 11); President Donald Trump's national emergency declaration (March 13); and California's issuance of a statewide stay-at-home order, the first in the U.S. (March 19).

In a country where we can't seem to agree much about anything, we are united in our zeal to get back to life as we knew it, pre-COVID. So, it's not surprising

that roughly 2.5 million weddings are expected to happen this year, according to the Wedding Report, the most since 1984.

While we are all taking strides to regain some semblance of normalcy, our school-aged kids are stumbling. Just think about it: A child who completed third grade in 2020 returned to school last fall as a sixth-grader. There's a lot of social-emotional learning (SEL) that happens during those years.

SEL is considered an integral part of education and human development. The term was first introduced by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning nearly 30 years ago. Through SEL, children acquire and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities; manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals; and feel and show empathy for others.

While the academic losses attributable to the pandemic are very real and heartbreaking — especially among kids in under-resourced communities — the

SEL losses seem even more concerning. Not long ago, I heard from the principal at a local middle school who is nearly overwhelmed by the behavioral issues she's seeing. With so many classroom disruptions, teaching and learning can't keep pace with grade-level requirements.

At the National Conflict Resolution Center, we have been working in schools for nearly 15 years, tackling what's known as the school-to-prison pipeline.

We are helping school districts transform their cultures and adopt restorative, rather than punitive, approaches to student discipline. But rather than system building, our team is on the front line, assisting teachers and administrators exhausted by the chaos. At the same time, we have seen a significant increase in referrals to our diversion program that keeps youth out of the criminal justice system, when harm is caused.

I'm not suggesting that we should have done things differently, as far as remote schooling is

concerned. Faced with this situation again — with our public health at stake — we would make the same decision, even knowing the unfortunate (and unintended) consequences.

Certainly, the predicament was made worse by the personal loss that so many children have suffered. A study in the journal *Pediatrics* found that 1 out of 500 children in the U.S. have been orphaned or lost a grandparent caregiver due to COVID; children of racial and ethnic minorities have been disproportionately affected.

The impact of that type of loss on a child's social-emotional development seems immeasurable.

It speaks to the urgent need for programming and services to help our kids, who may otherwise face lifelong deficits. In December, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond announced a plan to recruit 10,000 new mental health clinicians to work with California students. Thurmond cited the alarming increases in depression,

anxiety and general distress among students during the pandemic — issues that appear to be persisting in our post-pandemic world.

I also wonder and worry about the children who have disappeared. At the peak, an estimated 3 million children didn't show up for remote learning and were unaccounted for. Thousands of them never logged on or reappeared when classrooms reopened in the fall. What are the prospects for their social-emotional learning?

The last of the federal mask mandates — requiring travelers to mask up on airplanes, trains and buses — is set to expire on April 18. With the most visible and contentious symbol of COVID going away, we can't forget what's most important: the wellbeing of our kids.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit [ncrconline.com](http://ncrconline.com).

## SHORE Funding always key obstacle

FROM B1 considered, Flick said.

"Eventually, we will have to retreat from the coast, but that's decades away," he said. "In the meantime, sand retention and sand nourishment, if we want to keep sand on our beaches .... go hand in hand."

Sand is vital to San Diego County for a number of reasons. Wide beaches protect bluff-top homes, highways, parks and campgrounds from erosion, the ocean surf and powerful storms. Also, the attractive shoreline is vital for the tourism that feeds the region's economy.

SANDAG completed its first regional sand project in 2001. The material used then was relatively fine, and a series of bigger-than-usual winter storms soon washed away a large part of it. Scientists say a third project could focus more on delivering the heavier, longer-lasting sediment that accumulates in ocean deposits outside the surf zone.

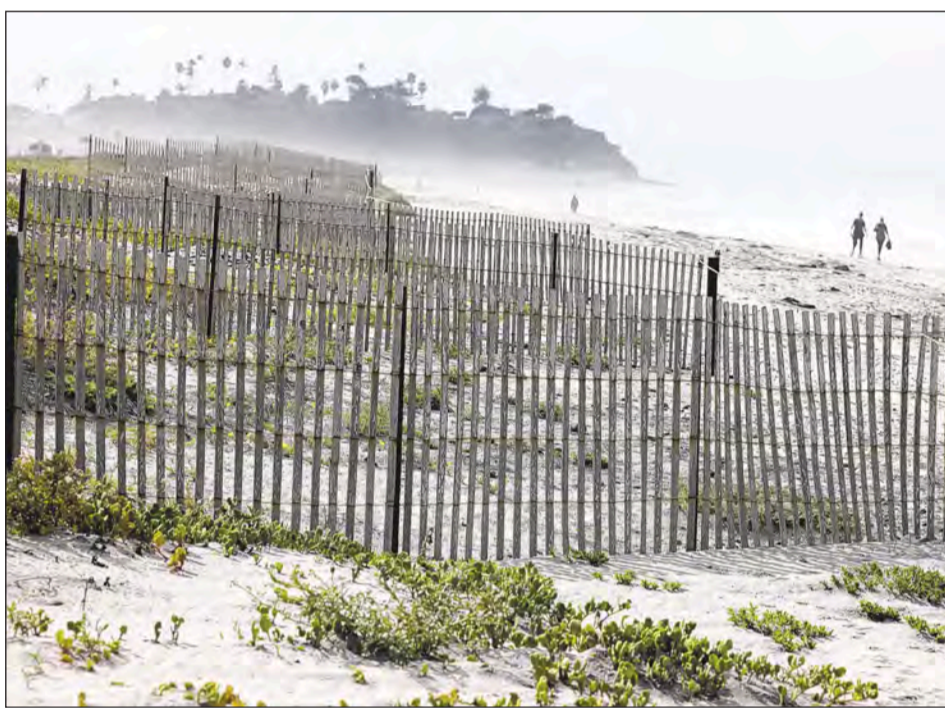
Funding is the biggest hurdle for every sand replenishment project, another lesson learned from past efforts. The first step is getting coastal cities to make a financial commitment, preservation group members said.

"We're all in support of that," said Del Mar Mayor Dwight Worden, the group's acting chair. "A regional solution is the way to go."

The renewed effort to find a regional solution follows a solo Oceanside proposal that appeared to get off on the wrong foot last year.

The Oceanside City Council, without consulting its coastal neighbors, voted 4-1 in August 2021 to spend \$1 million on plans and permits to build rock groins and a sand bypass system. Mayor Esther Sanchez opposed the project, saying the California Coastal Commission, which generally opposes building permanent structures on the beach, will never approve it.

Oceanside's move surprised coastal cities to the south, who worry that the groins would block them from the downstream flow of sand along the coast. Studies show the devices slow or stop the steady migration of sand carried by ocean currents, which helps some



**A series of fences designed to collect and retain sand are part of a beach restoration project at Cardiff State Beach.**

areas, but hurts others.

Carlsbad, Solana Beach and Del Mar each adopted resolutions opposing the Oceanside project. A better plan would be for SANDAG to take the lead on a regional plan that helps all the cities, they said.

Several San Diego County coastal cities have occasionally used local replenishment projects to build up their beaches for decades.

Oceanside's northernmost beaches get sediment dredged annually from the mouth of the city's harbor.

But the harbor sediment is fine-grained, doesn't last long and is never carried very far south. The lower two-thirds of Oceanside's coast has eroded to a narrow beach that's usually completely underwater at high tide.

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SANDAG's 2012 regional project produced a total of 1.4 million cubic yards, taken from three different offshore deposits. The sand was placed at eight different San Diego County locations from Oceanside on the north to Imperial Beach on the south.

The previous regional project in 2001 was even larger, pumping a total of 2.1 million cubic yards of material onto beaches.

The 2012 regional project used the 2001 effort as a model, and took sand from some of the same places, SANDAG officials said. But escalating costs in 2012 forced the agency to down-

size the project, so less material was obtained.

As a result, some sites that received sand in 2001, such as Torrey Pines State Beach, got nothing in 2012. Also, the city of San Diego had recently received sand at Mission and Pacific beaches from dredging the mouth of Mission Bay, so it needed no material from the second regional effort.

Several other San Diego County beaches also receive regular replenishment from local projects.

Carlsbad gets much of its sand from the Agua Hedionda Lagoon, which has been dredged about every two years since the 1950s. Initially, the excavation was required to keep the lagoon deep enough to feed ocean water to the cooling system of the Encina power plant.

Another benefit of the ongoing maintenance is that Agua Hedionda is the only San Diego County lagoon deep enough to allow boating, paddle-boarding and other activities. Today it continues to be dredged because the seawater feeds the Carlsbad desalination plant, which provides 10 percent of the county's drinking water.

One of the county's most recently restored shorelines is on its central coast at Cardiff State Beach in Encinitas.

Completed in 2019, the project took sand from the environmental restoration of the San Elijo Lagoon, which had been filling with silt for decades. Unlike other beach nourishment projects in the region, the beach restoration there included wind fences and the establishment of native plants to help

hold the sand in place.

Multiple stages of time-consuming planning, environmental and engineering work are required before any replenishment project can begin. Environmental concerns such as grunion and lobster seasons need to be considered, also the presence of marine mammals, turtles, and nesting birds. But most important, money is needed.

SANDAG's shoreline preservation group includes elected officials from each of the coastal city councils. They work with planners, property owners, and community and environmental groups to study projects such as sand retention and beach replenishment.

The group, which normally meets quarterly, has scheduled a special session in April to further discuss the details of recruiting cities to contribute to the costs of another regional sand project.

Local money pays a small percentage of the total project costs. Generally, it's used for things such as feasibility studies and early planning to get the effort started.

Construction costs are the largest part of the expense. In 2012 that included the huge cost of bringing to San Diego a dredge large enough for the job from the East Coast, said Shelby Tucker, the project manager for SANDAG.

Grants pay about 85 percent of the project costs and the remaining 15 percent comes from local agencies such as cities, Tucker said.

Even though the actual construction only took a few months in 2012, planning, engineering and

find funding began about 2005, she said.

"We didn't receive all the money at once," Tucker told the working group. "We received it in three different fiscal years ... divided into \$6.5 million for three years."

The largest single source of money for the 2012 project was the state Department of Boating and Waterways. Other sources included the federal Minerals Management Service's Coastal Impact Assistance Program and the California Coastal Commission's sand mitigation fund.

Different funding sources could be available for the next sand project, said Anna Van, an associate regional planner at SANDAG.

"Funding to mitigate for climate disasters and risks have been hot topics at the federal and state level lately," Van said, so federal sources could include FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Other possibilities include the California Office of Emergency Services, the state Department of Boating and Waterways, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Navy.

"It will take time and effort for us to pursue these opportunities," Van said.

Oceanside Councilmember Ryan Keim and Encinitas Councilmember Kellie Hinze both said they would ask their city councils to contribute to a regional project.

Oceanside relies heavily on tourism and has been hit hard by beach erosion.

The southern two-thirds of Oceanside's coastline has been scoured down to the rock revetments, and at high tide there's no beach at all. Residents and elected officials have been working for years to protect the homes and vacation rentals from erosion.

Encinitas and Solana Beach have been working together with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies for more than a decade on a major beach restoration project that is finally ready to start. The collaboration will take sand from offshore deposits and place it onto the cities' shores every five to 10 years for the next 50 years.

"We are looking forward to the 50-year sand replenishment," Hinze said.

But that sand will only be distributed south of Beacon's Beach, while Encinitas and Solana Beach, like much of California, have other beaches that need nourishment.

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## TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, March 27, the 86th day of 2022.

### Today's highlight in history

On March 27, 1977, in aviation's worst disaster, 583 people were killed when a KLM Boeing 747, attempting to take off in heavy fog, crashed into a Pan Am 747 on an airport runway on the Canary Island of Tenerife.

### On this date

**In 1513**, Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon sighted present-day Florida.

**In 1625**, Charles I acceded to the English throne upon the death of James I.

**In 1794**, Congress approved "An Act to provide a Naval Armament" of six armed ships.

**In 1912**, first lady Helen Herron Taff and the wife of Japan's ambassador to the United States, Viscountess Chinda, planted the first two of 3,000 cherry trees given to the U.S. as a gift by the mayor of Tokyo.

**In 1945**, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower told reporters in Paris that German defenses on the Western Front had been broken.

**In 1964**, Alaska was hit by a magnitude 9.2 earthquake (the strongest on record in North America) and tsunamis that together claimed about 130 lives.

**In 1973**, "The Godfather" won the Academy Award for best picture of 1972, but its star, Marlon Brando, refused to accept his Oscar for best actor. Instead, Brando sent actress and activist Sacheen Littlefeather in his place, who gave a speech on the mistreatment of Native Americans in film.

**In 1975**, construction began on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which was completed two years later.

### Today's birthdays

Actor Julian Glover is 87. Actor Jerry Lacy is 86. Hall of Fame racer Cale Yarborough is 83. Actor-director Austin Pendleton is 82. Actor Michael York is 80. Musician Andrew Farriss (INXS) is 63. Director Quentin Tarantino is 59. Actor Talisa Soto is 55. Singer Mariah Carey is 52. Actor Elizabeth Mitchell is 52. Actor Nathan Fillion is 51. Singer Fergie is 47. MLB player Buster Posey is 35. Actor Brenda Song is 34.

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## LAYOFFS

FROM B1  
 district of the San Marcos teachers union. "There's a teacher shortage. Any of these people who want to find another job, they will."

San Marcos has had a structural budget deficit since 2017, and the district has avoided making budget cuts needed to fix it. As a result, the district's deficit continued to grow, leading to the district's need now to make a batch of layoffs.

Officials said they believe this is the largest reduction of staff the district has had.

"This is an unfortunate fork in the road, if you will," said Henry Voros, the district's assistant superintendent of human resources, at a recent board meeting. "I'd like to say that's something that is new to the district, but it has been a pattern quite frankly in our district for a number of years."

San Marcos is the only district in San Diego County that has placed itself on the state's watch list of financially at-risk districts twice this

school year. The district has been on the state watch list since December 2020.

School budget experts regularly warn school districts that they need to cut costs to right-size their budgets each year, especially as declining enrollment threatens to shrink districts' revenues.

"Those hard decisions have just been postponed and put off, hoping that the state would come through with additional funding," said Erin Garcia, who became San Marcos' assistant superintendent of business six months ago. "If you don't address them, those deficits tend to compound over time."

The district lost 1,100 students, or 5 percent of enrollment, in the first year of the pandemic. In December the district estimated that, both because of lower enrollment and low attendance due to COVID, it would lose \$17 million of revenue in the next school year. That's because state funding for schools is based on enrollment and attendance.

Garcia added that San Marcos doesn't get as much state funding

per student as other nearby districts like Oceanside and Vista because it does not meet a state threshold of disadvantaged students that gives districts a higher rate of funding. About 40 percent of San Marcos students are low-income, foster, homeless, or English-learner students, while the state gives significantly more money per student in those categories for districts with 55 percent or more.

San Marcos is also an early example of what lies ahead for school districts as COVID aid dollars run out.

More than half of the teachers on the chopping block, including intervention teachers, counselors and social workers, were hired using one-time pandemic aid. From the beginning, they were never meant to stay at the district forever.

Public schools have received a wealth of federal and state dollars to address COVID and learning loss resulting from school closures. But the money was always intended to be one-time, meaning schools could not rely on it to hire

and keep staff forever, even though schools say they need and want to keep the new staff.

San Marcos got about \$62 million in COVID funds, of which it has spent about half, Garcia said.

The district used COVID and learning loss money to hire more custodians, social workers, counselors, intervention teachers, campus supervisors and contact tracers, Garcia said. It also increased health aides' hours from part time to full time.

The district issued notices to all staff hired using state aid meant to address learning loss, even though that money doesn't expire until June 2024. Garcia said the district is figuring out how many staff it can keep next year, but she anticipates many will be gone starting next school year.

Teachers and staff are protesting the potential layoffs. Pluciennik said he worries they will cause class sizes to increase. The layoffs also mean that physical education teachers will be reduced from full-time to part-time status.

Pluciennik said he thinks the

district issued too many layoff notices and the district instead should have cut central office staff to keep the reductions away from the classroom.

Some staff members said it will be difficult for schools to pick up the work left behind by eliminated employees. Yvonne Brett, a librarian at San Marcos High, said at a recent board meeting that even with all of her campus' custodians, students have to help pick up trash on campus and custodians have come in to work extra on weekends.

"These layoffs are destroying the little scrap of morale that is left for all our classified employees after two years of working their own jobs, plus a variety of additional duties through these very unsettling times," Brett said.

San Marcos will have enough staff for schools after layoffs, according to the district's analysis, Garcia said. The district's declining enrollment means it doesn't need as many teachers and staff, she said.

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