

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

AS NEW YEAR BEGINS, OLD TROUBLES PLAGUE SCHOOLS

While media attention has been focused on Washington, D.C., and the early moves of House Republicans (following Rep. Kevin McCarthy's messy election to become speaker), I've been reflecting a lot on an issue that's closer to home.

It's the trauma that's overtaken our schools and school systems — at every level. The pandemic exacerbated old vulnerabilities, unleashing anger and frustration that have taken the focus away from learning.

The return to school, post-winter break, must have been even harder this year.

For decades, public schools have been challenged to keep up with the needs of their students. Hard-working educators "get by," despite too few resources and too little planning time — not to mention pandemic disruptions, safety concerns and intense public scrutiny. It's impacted both the number of individuals entering the teaching profession (down significantly from a decade ago) and the number who have quit.

A 2022 report by the National Education Association draws a

straight line from this reality to funding and policy decisions that have resulted in low teacher pay (when compared with other professions that have comparable education and training requirements) and a lack of professional respect. The report said that funding shortfalls have caused "an unprecedented school staffing crisis across nearly every job category."

Failing to address these shortages has led to negative effects on students, who returned to classrooms last fall still suffering from the impacts of the pandemic and remote learning. Test results have shown a sharp decline in reading and math scores among elementary school students, especially the lower performers. There were also significant setbacks in social-emotional learning — foundational to coping with everyday challenges.

The situation in schools has been made worse by deepening polarization that mirrors societal discord. And while I'm reluctant to blame parents, a small group of them is driving a big wedge in school districts here

and around the country.

In a recent posting on EdSource, former San Diego Unified School District Superintendent Carl Cohn wrote about a meeting of the Temecula Valley Unified School District Board that he attended last month. The new five-person board was sworn in that evening; three were elected thanks to the efforts of evangelical pastor Tim Thompson and his Inland Empire Family PAC.

Thompson has described the Temecula public schools as "the devil's playground."

Cohn said there was vigorous cheering and booing during the public comment portion of the agenda, evidence of a divided community. The main agenda items were two resolutions proposed by the new board president. One condemned racism in the district; the other would ban the teaching of critical race theory, which examines the role of institutions in racism throughout history.

While several students argued for teaching the "full, unvarnished history of race in America," both resolutions passed on 3-2 votes,

with the new majority prevailing.

Cohn observed that the idea of putting the "right kind of adults in charge" is troubling and underestimates the power of positive teacher/student relationships.

The morning following the votes, hundreds of high school students walked out of class in protest.

With our school systems on the brink, what is the path forward?

At the National Conflict Resolution Center, our Restorative Practices team is working with school administrators in districts across San Diego County to reimagine their school culture — and to make it welcoming for all students, educators, staff and families. They know their communities are still hurting in the aftermath of the pandemic.

And so, we are introducing tools and techniques to build strong, positive relationships that are based in trust.

We accomplish this, in part, by engaging all members of the school community in conversation. As connections are forged, a sense of belonging and shared responsibility grows, enabling all

to thrive. Students take ownership of their actions.

But conversation doesn't just happen, especially for someone experiencing trauma. The process of healing begins by giving a person space, rather than assuming we know why they are feeling or acting a certain way — or jumping to problem solve, as we are apt to do.

As it turns out, venting is a tried-and-true mediation technique. It allows a person to release their anger and move on to next steps. But it only works when those on the receiving end listen and demonstrate understanding — and don't try to diminish or shame others for what they are feeling. That can be tough to do.

While our work in schools is just starting, our restorative team stands ready to assist Congress with relationship building. But first, they must promise to listen.

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 nccrconline.com

HEIGHTS

FROM B1 Street.

"Between Gaylord and ourselves, for the first time, people living in downtown San Diego are going to be able to look to the south and see Chula Vista's skyline," said Kevin O'Neill with MountainWest.

An essential feature of the project is its proximity to public transit, which caters to Chula Vista's Urban Core Specific Plan of bringing "more housing, additional shopping opportunities, greater emphasis on walking instead of driving, and new revenue sources."

In front of the project's hotel and affordable housing units is the E Street train station, which runs along I-5.

"Putting the Bayview project next to the trolley station will give people who live there easy access to be able to go to their job or go to a Padres game, Third Avenue or go to the Gaylord, as well as people who can get to the medical center," said Mayor John McCann.

For developers, Bayview meets the criteria of increasing ridership for MTS and revenue for Chula Vista via sales, property and transit occupancy tax monies.

MTS has not studied if a rise in ridership is guaranteed, as negotiations are still under way, but with the amount of housing, office and retail proposed, that is expected, according to the agency.

"MTS would generally expect these developments to increase ridership at the E Street Transit Center," said spokesperson Mark Olson. "The project will also act as a gateway to the upcoming Bayfront Convention Center project, which MTS hopes will encourage transit connections."

Research has shown that "well-designed, concen-

Proposed Bayview Point mixed-use development

The project would be on a 10-acre site on the city's west side near the bayfront and includes luxury residential towers, affordable housing, a five-star hotel and restaurants, retail, a medical center and outdoor public-use spaces near public transit.



Sources: MountainWest Real Estate; OpenStreetMap MICHELLE GUERRERO U-T

trated, mixed-use development around transit nodes can boost patronage as much as five to six times higher than comparable development away from transit," a 2004 Transportation Research Board study found.

The transit center, with three bus routes, is already an active location in MTS' network. E Street sees about 6,000 transit boardings on an average weekday, Olson said.

There is a study between Chula Vista and the San Diego Association of Governments, the region's planning agency, to analyze alternatives for grade separating the MTS light rail train from the roadway crossings at E Street and H Street, which

could turn into a challenge for a project like Bayview Point.

Olson said the benefit is that a separation would "allow street traffic and Trolley traffic to flow independently from one another" and improve traffic flow around E Street.

"The initial challenges associated with the grade separation is funding; the second and larger challenge will be to keep all traffic — light rail, heavy rail, buses, bikes and personal vehicles — running while the grade separation is being constructed," he added.

Developers will also have to meet with Cool Down Coffee owners. Co-owner Alex Welti said his shop is a bustling cafe that has served

many residents and tourists, especially with its proximity to the border, over the past eight years as the sole business in a busy transit center. A building for retail is planned for where the cafe currently stands. O'Neill said that "(a)s to their setting up in the new building," it would depend on what they could agree on but the project remains in its negotiations phase.

MTS can only lease their property, so the parties are working to arrive at an acceptable lease. As for the city, the developer is looking to buy the Chula Vista-owned site, said O'Neill. Once disposition and development agreements between the agencies have been drafted, the City Council and MTS board will consider approval.

Negotiations come after Chula Vista solicited development teams in 2019 that would transform the 10-acre area. The city favored a project that would prioritize job creation and long-term revenue, while MTS prioritized affordable housing, which Bayview is proposing on F and E Streets.

After pandemic-related delays, two developer teams — Affirmed Housing and Bayview Point — were interviewed in June 2022. Affirmed Housing had proposed 570 residential units, of which more than 340 would be affordable housing. Their proposal did not include a hotel or retail. Bayview Point's development team includes Chelsea Investment Corporation, Tucker Sadler Architects, The Concord Group, Kimley-Horn, Wimmer Yamada and Caughey and Andrea Trapp.

Once approved, O'Neill said he envisions the project breaking ground in late 2024 with the affordable housing component.

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BRIDGE

FROM B1

tected in the San Clemente slope. The Orange County Transportation Authority, which owns the right-of-way there, is installing 220 ground anchors in two rows drilled deep into the bedrock to hold back the slow-moving landslide.

The OCTA board of directors declared a local emergency in early October, and said at the time that the stabilization work would take 30 to 45 days to complete. Since then, the projected completion date has been extended several times, largely because of the wet weather, and now is expected to be finished by the end of March.

The situation in San Clemente is compounded by erosion. Waves, high tides and storm surge have chewed away the beach at the base of the slope and contributed to the landslide.

In all, the tracks have been pushed 28 inches toward the ocean since September 2021.

Most of that movement occurred after rain storms in 2021, and since then the agency has placed tons of boulder riprap at the base of the slide to help shore up the slope. No new movement has been detected in recent weeks, OCTA officials said.

Buses have long been used to fill in the blanks between passenger trains.

North County Transit District, which operates the Coaster commuter train between Oceanside and San Diego and Sprinter trains between Oceanside and Escondido, uses bus bridges when breakdowns or other situations stop trains.

Generally, the bus takes passengers to the next station where a passenger train is available.

"NCTD uses bus bridges during planned and unplanned service disruptions that prevent the Sprinter or Coaster from reaching the scheduled stops," said Chris Orlando, chief planning and communications officer at the agency.

"The use of a bus bridge is rare and generally for a brief period of time," Orlando said in an email Friday. "When they are needed, we work hard to minimize the impact on customers."

"For planned events, it is scheduled in advance and communicated to customers," he said. "Our operations control center implements bus bridges as soon as possible after an unplanned disruption, using available staff and vehicles from within our fleet."

In most cases, train service quickly returns to nor-

mal, usually the same day.

NCTD has its own erosion problems, particularly along the tracks on the steep bluffs in Del Mar. A series of seawalls, soldier piles and drainage structures have been installed there over the past 20 years, and more construction is planned.

A long-term plan being developed by the San Diego Association of Governments would reroute the 1.7 miles of tracks in Del Mar inland through a tunnel. That solution could be completed in 2035 at the earliest, SANDAG has said.

OCTA has said it will consider possible long-term solutions for San Clemente, but so far it has made no progress toward removing the tracks away from the coast.

OCTA has suspended its Metrolink trains from San Clemente to Oceanside during the stabilization project, and no bus bridge is available for Metrolink. Oceanside normally is the southernmost stop on the Metrolink system, which has routes as far north as Ventura and east into Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Del Mar and San Clemente aren't the only places where the 140-year-old coastal railroad is subject to erosion.

Amtrak announced Wednesday that as of Thursday, because of recent storms, passenger service would be suspended for 10 to 16 days between Goleta, which is just north of Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo. No bus bridge is available to close the nearly 100-mile gap.

That problem is the result of damage to a railroad bridge just outside of Goleta, said Robynn Tysver, a communications manager for Union Pacific Railroad. "Flooding displaced rock at the base of the bridge that we are shoring up or repairing," Tysver said Thursday. "We have crews on-site right now. It could take up to two weeks."

San Luis Obispo is at the northern end of the 350-mile LOSSAN rail corridor that runs between that city, Los Angeles and San Diego. It is one of the busiest passenger rail lines in the United States, second only to Northeast Corridor between Washington, D.C., and Boston.

The northern end of the LOSSAN corridor, on the Central California coast, is the most sparsely populated section of the route with just three stations between Goleta and San Luis Obispo.

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CROSS

FROM B1

getting the Medal of Honor later."

The upgrade was approved last month by U.S. Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro.

"Having reviewed the findings of now numerous investigations related to the case of Capt. Royce Williams, I have determined this case to be special and extraordinary," Del Toro said in a news release dated Dec. 22. "His actions clearly distinguished himself during a high-risk mission and deserve proper recognition." On Nov. 18, 1952, Williams

was in a F9F-5 Panther jet patrolling the Yalu River, which separated North Korean and Soviet territories. The Soviets weren't directly involved in the war, but they had planes in the sky, protecting their airspace.

Williams and three other Americans, also in Panthers, encountered seven hostile Soviet MiG-15s. The other U.S. planes were soon scattered by engine trouble and enemy fire, and Williams found himself in the dogfight alone. He shot down at least four of them before escaping to a U.S. aircraft carrier.

"A lot of it was awareness of where they were and how I had to maneuver to avoid them," he told the Union-

Tribune in an interview last year. "They were taking turns. I decided if I concentrated on shooting them down, then I'd become an easy target. So my initial goal was to look for defensive opportunities when they made mistakes."

When he landed, he counted 263 holes in his plane. He was uninjured.

Worried about drawing the Soviets into the Korean War, U.S. military commanders hushed any public mention of the battle. Williams got pats on the back — and shared a cocktail with President-elect Dwight Eisenhower — but was ordered not to tell anyone, not even his wife.

He served another 23 years in the Navy, including 110 flight missions over Vietnam.

In the early 2000s, U.S. records from the Korean War were declassified, and word of the dogfight spread, especially in military aviation circles.

A 2014 book by a Russian military historian mentions the encounter. It said that seven MiGs left a base in Vladivostok that morning, and only one returned. Four were shot down by a single U.S. aircraft, another was shot up and crashed, and the seventh plane was never found.

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SCENE

The Arc of San Diego

Winter Wonderland Fashion Show & Luncheon

BY U-T STAFF

The Arc of San Diego held its Winter Wonderland Fashion Show & Luncheon last month at the US Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego.

All funds raised from the event benefited The Arc of San Diego and its services for children and adults with disabilities.

Guests enjoyed a silent auction and holiday shopping vendor boutique followed by a luncheon and runway show produced by Style Personality Leonard Simpson. The program also

included a live auction hosted by auctioneer Clint Bell.

Event chairs were Maria Stanley and her daughter, Cici Drummond. The event was sponsored by Jon & Linda Kurtin, Norma Hidalgo-del Rio, RPh, Leo & Emma Zuckerman, Foster & Pamela Beckett Stahl, Arlene Esgate and Dr. and Mrs. Howard G. Milstein.

The Arc of San Diego is one of the largest service providers for people with disabilities in the county. It annually serves more than 2,000 children and adults with intellectual and devel-

opmental disabilities, such as autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome.

If your organization has held a philanthropic event, you're welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduiontribune.com.

Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer's name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.



From left, Malissa Sanfilippo, Maria Stanley, Cici Drummond, Jennifer Navarra, Brittany Simpson, Leonard Simpson, Kathryn Vaughn and Christina Maggiora.

DOUGLAS GATES