

## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:

**Mr. Josh Harris— Yuba County Superintendent of Schools**

**What led you to become County Superintendent?** I came to be the county superintendent in a roundabout way. I was working as the SELPA Director for my county when the current superintendent decided she was ready to retire. This job was not on my “To

Do” list; however, since my entire educational career has been in Yuba County, I felt I had a good background to take on this immense challenge. I learn something new everyday and am able to work with an outstanding staff of dedicated people. This is a very challenging job, but the staff makes the Yuba County Office of Education a great place to work.

**What inspired you to enter the field of education?** When I was in middle school in the 1970’s, my school was chosen to begin integrating students with disabilities. These students became my friends and it was so natural to work with them side-by-side in class. I was not happy with my chosen profession after being an attorney for 8 years, so I completely switched careers to something I thought would be more in line with my personality: I became a special education teacher. I haven’t regretted a single moment since then. Education is my passion. My career change proved to me that if you follow your heart, you can be happy every day.

**Do you have a particular goal that drives you?** My goal is to increase the number and variety of opportunities for Yuba County students so that they can lead a productive and successful life. I have worked with Yuba County families for 17 years – I want the best for their children.

**What objectives do you hope to achieve?** We are improving how we meet our goals through Professional Learning Communities. Using that structure, we want to increase achievement at our various school sites, add additional opportunities to our county charter school and increase opportunities for the unique learning needs of students.

**What are your interests?** Reading fiction and non-fiction and spending time with my family take up most of my time outside of work. I have trained and competed in 2 different martial arts disciplines over the last 14 years and am trying to make time to be more involved again. My wife tries to talk me into doing Yoga instead.

**Who are the special people in your life?** The special people in my life are my wife Dawn and my children Alex, Joseph, Kate and Nick. My extended family and my friends are also important in my life. The educators in Yuba County who have been my mentors (Sally Sokoloski, Dennis Bissel, Ric Teagarden and Scotia Holmes-Sanchez) will always be special to me.

## FROM THE DESK OF:

**Peter Birdsall**, CCSESA Executive Director

This issue of the CCSESA newsletter reflects both the impressive accomplishments of the year just ending and the exciting possibilities for the coming year. After years of frustrating impasse, ESEA was finally reauthorized when the President signed the Every Student Succeeds Act into law on December 10 (see related article on page 2). In 2016 we now move to working with the State Board of Education, California and U.S. Departments of Education, and other interested groups and agencies, to develop a coherent and effective accountability and support system for California’s schools.

We began December with news that the Bechtel Foundation has approved a planning grant for us to develop a 3-year plan to support quality implementation of the California math and science standards in grades K-8 (see related article on page 2). This represents an increasing awareness by

foundations and policy-makers that county superintendents are the most direct, ongoing support and connection with local school districts throughout the state. It also represents a recognition of the importance of collaborative efforts to build capacity and consistency across all the counties in California.

Finally, at its December meeting the CCSESA Board approved the first edition of the LCAP Guide for county superintendents. Scheduled for release in January, this guide builds on the lessons of the fiscal accountability system and creates an important mechanism for us to continue to share issues and effective practices. A common term in Sacramento policy discussions now is “continuous improvement.” CCSESA can be proud both of the progress made in 2015 and the potential for continuing improvement in the coming year.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

January Quarterly Meeting:

The next Quarterly Meeting will take place at the Monterey Plaza Hotel from January 25-27. The last day to register is January 11. Please contact [JaConya Merchant](#) with any questions.

CCSESA Joins the California Equity Leadership Alliance:

The California Equity Leadership Alliance (CELA) is a new collaborative effort made up of organizations that are committed to promoting policies and practices that eliminate gaps in opportunity, access, and achievement throughout the state. For more details, [click here](#).

**In Case You Missed It:** CCSESA has released a number of spotlight stories featuring innovative programs established by county offices of education. [Click here](#) to read more.

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EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

Nearly eight years after the expiration of “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB), CCSESA is excited that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized last week. On December 9, 2015, after largely bi-partisan votes in both Houses (359-64 in the House, 85-12 in the Senate), the President signed the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA) into law. This bill is the result of years of advocacy by state and national education associations, including CCSESA, and impressive leadership by Senate Education Chair Lamar Alexander (R- TN) and Co-chair Patty Murray (D-WA). CCSESA is proud of the role our members played in urging reauthorization and wants to thank all those who participated in the Federal Task Force, joined one of our three advocacy trips to Washington D.C., or made calls to their local Congressman or Senator.

Among other things, ESSA eliminates the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) standards, repeals many of the federally mandated interventions imposed by NCLB, and scales back the federal

government’s role in local decision-making. Under ESSA, states will be required to identify and improve student learning at the lowest performing 5% of Title I schools and those schools where the graduation rate falls below 67%; however, LEAs will have the authority to develop and implement their own comprehensive support and improvement plans while the states provides technical assistance and support. While there are still many details to be ironed out, particularly with regard to the state’s accountability system plan, CCSESA is pleased overall with the compromise achieved by ESSA and looks forward to the additional flexibility afforded by the bill.

As we move into 2016, we anticipate extensive discussions with the State Board of Education and other interested parties regarding California’s implementation plan. In addition, we expect that our federal advocacy trip this coming spring will focus in large part on the implementing policies and regulations that must be adopted by the U.S. Department of Education. We will provide additional information on trip dates and details as they become available.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR STANDARDS SUPPORT

We are excited to announce that CCSESA has received a planning grant from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation to develop a long-term (3 year) plan to build County Office of Education (COE) capacity to deliver impactful science and math professional development to district partners with a high degree of consistency and quality across the state. This work will focus on grades K-8.

Potential components of the statewide system of support would be:

**County Office of Education Communities of Practice for Math and Science:** (1) Include representative content leaders and experts from each COE, with the support of experts from other organizations and agencies as appropriate to the issues being discussed at each meeting. (2) Meet quarterly for two days to receive professional learning and develop action plans for how county offices can most effectively work with the school districts in their jurisdiction to strengthen implementation of the math and science standards. (3) Serve as a feedback loop from the field to the state and other organizations and agencies at the state policy level regarding resources, materials, policies, etc. (4) Identify and share common problems and exemplary

practices from across the state. (5) Build the consistency of practice across the state for COEs delivering math and science professional learning. (6) Focus on strategies to increase/strengthen local use of Interim and Summative Assessment as well as Formative Assessment practices.

Math and Science Collaboration Committees:

(1) Collaborate with the California State Board of Education and California Department of Education to establish common language and understanding with a common message for the state. (2) Engage with districts to determine the needs from the field. (3) Detail the topics that need to be covered in resource development and training and the timelines for those activities. (4) Work to connect the curriculum/instruction issues and messages with the assessment issues and messages, so that they reflect a coherent statewide implementation plan.

Our goal is to develop the long term plan to submit it to the foundation by the middle of April 2016 for potential funding. This project will be led by Efrain Mercado (CCSESA) with the support of CISC members- Valerie Chrisman (Ventura), Sue Stickel (Sacramento), Ellen Barger (Santa Barbara) and Jane Steinkamp (San Joaquin). All county offices will have an opportunity to participate and offer feedback and recommendations to the long term plan that is submitted.

ARTS INITIATIVE UPDATE

On January 29, 2016 CCSESA Arts Initiative and Sacramento COE School of Education, in partnership with the California Department of Education, will be hosting **Creativity at the Core: Integrating the Visual and Performing Arts with English Language Arts** - a Professional Learning Offering which will take place at the Sacramento COE Conference Center.

This event provides an opportunity for administrators and teachers to work with national arts integration expert, Lisa Donavon and receive a copy of her book. This innovative professional learning day will help you build academic achievement, enthusiasm for learning, and student motivation. View the event flyer [here](#), and you may register [here](#).

IT’S TIME FOR SUMMER... ALMOST

At our quarterly meeting in April, we heard an update from the *Summer Matters* campaign, including the exciting momentum of summer programming in districts and county offices across California. This past summer, more and more districts invested in innovative summer learning programs and helped tens of thousands of students stay engaged and energized about learning all summer long.

Though it doesn’t feel like summer, now is the time for districts and county offices to pick their

summer strategy. County Superintendents can play a helpful role in this decision-making process by providing information and resources about strategies – like summer learning – that meet district and LCFF goals.

In the next few weeks, each County Superintendent will receive an email from the *Summer Matters* campaign containing new helpful resources for summer learning.

For more information, please contact [Katie Brackenridge](#) at the *Summer Matters* campaign.

