

NEWS

July 17, 2020

For Immediate Release

“Inspiring Summers” Gives a Boost to San Mateo County Young Learners During Vacation Months

More Than 550 Students Learn STEAM Curriculum, Reading Skills

SAN BRUNO, Calif. – At Belle Air Elementary School located east of downtown San Bruno, students this year have delighted in an island summer.

At Strawberry Island, rising kindergartners wave, dance and “chomp” with their hands to “Baby Shark.” At Smart Island, rising third graders perform intricate moves to “We Know the Way” from Disney’s Moana. A luau is up next.

Along the way, the students are gaining skills in math, science, literacy, geography and more with teachers and coaches to guide them.

They are among more than 550 young learners across San Mateo County participating in [Inspiring Summers](#), an initiative to give kids from families with limited financial means the same opportunities as their peers.

“The best thing I learned is multiplication and times tables.”
■ A rising third grader

Inspiring Summers is an initiative of [The Big Lift](#), a bold social venture that aims to ensure all San Mateo County students – regardless of family income or circumstances – are reading at grade level by the end of third grade.

“The research backs this up: students who are actively engaged in summer learning are better prepared for the upcoming school year,” said Nancy Magee, County Superintendent of Schools. “BLIS and programs like this are also essential to the future success of our county’s children.”

The Big Lift’s partnership includes the [County of San Mateo](#), San Mateo County Office of Education ([SMCOE](#)), [Silicon Valley Community Foundation](#), and more than 300 businesses and community-based organizations.

Inspiring Summers is a four-week summer enrichment intervention for incoming kindergarten, first, second and third graders that is free to qualified families. Graduations are being held at locations across the county this week and next to celebrate participants' achievements.

“Up until the end of third grade, children are learning to read. Beginning in fourth grade most children are reading to learn – gaining knowledge about the world around them,” said San Mateo County Supervisor Carole Groom.

“This is a key benchmark because students not reading at grade level will fall further behind without interventions such as Inspiring Summers,” she said.

The program also aims to not only halt but reverse the “summer slide,” when many students lose two months or more of learning skills during vacation.

[BellXcel](#), a nationally recognized educational nonprofit, provides evidence-based literacy curriculum taught by local credentialed teachers. Students enrolled in Inspiring Summers in past years typically *gained* 3.5 months of reading skills, a substantial improvement.

To support family literacy and engagement, [San Mateo County Libraries](#) (SMCL) provides each student with a Comprehension Box to assist with guided family reading at home and a set of books to build their home libraries. Their parents receive a copy of “English For Everyone: Vocabulary Builder.”

“The best thing I learned about was the elements because I didn’t know about them.”

■ A rising third grader

The STEAM curriculum – Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math – features a different twist this year that allows for more flexibility and activities that families can do together at home.

Each young scholar receives a kit that includes hands-on materials with engaging activities for each family, as well as instructions in English and Spanish. SMCL coach staff also created videos hosted through a YouTube playlist which demonstrated each of 20 activities to make it easier for families to follow along.

“The Big Lift summer programs are designed for children to have fun and keep learning at the same time,” Groom said.

Due to COVID-19, the program at all sites follows the [San Mateo County Pandemic Recovery Framework](#), developed by the SMCOE and health partners to guide safety protocols intended to reduce the risk of spread of the coronavirus in schools.

Christine Thorsteinson of the SVCF said teachers gained a great deal of knowledge about how to instruct while wearing face coverings and helping students to practice physical distancing and other safety protocols.

“The program allows teachers to develop safe routines and new instructional strategies they can use when they return to on-campus learning,” she said. “That’s a bonus we really didn’t anticipate.”

Inspiring Summers 2020: By the Numbers

- Four communities: South San Francisco, Daly City, San Bruno and La Honda-Pescadero
- 566: Enrolled scholars
- 54: Classroom teachers
- 45: College interns/facilitators
- Six: Instructional coaches
- Six: Library coaches
- Four: Nurses/health technicians
- Five: District coordinators

To experience some of the joy in the Big Lift Inspiring Summers program, please take a look at this short video, [Inspiring Summers 2020!](#)

Funding for Inspiring Summers comes from a variety of sources, with major funding from the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors through investments from [Measure K](#), a countywide, voter-approved half-cent sales tax extension.

Media Contacts:

San Mateo County District 2 Supervisor Carole Groom
650-363-4568
cgroom@smcgov.org

Patricia Love
San Mateo County Office of Education
650-802-5559
plove@smcoe.org

Christine Thorsteinson
650-450-5587
cthorsteinson@siliconvalleycf.org

###

