



WALNUT ACRES
Jaguars

MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

January 11, 2016

Happy New Year Walnut Acres Parents!

Although I dreaded rising early last Monday morning to face the cold, dark day, it was absolutely delightful to arrive at school and connect with the children. They exuberantly shared the details of their holiday adventures, and they all seemed excited about their return to school. We will do our best to make their 2016 learning experiences as valuable and rich as possible, because they deserve no less.

This month I **want to talk to you about a plan we would like to pursue that would help enrich learning at Walnut Acres for all students.** I was recently reminded of the not-so-funny joke that if Rip Van Winkle were to wake up today he'd recognize only one thing-the classroom-because schools are so slow to change

Our Current Status

I hope you know that is not the case at Walnut Acres, where we are transforming into a school that rigorously implements the 6 Cs of critical and creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and global citizenship, along with content mastery. Whether this transition is labeled as Common Core, 21st Century, STEAM or STEM, it is a sea change from traditional instruction and we are plowing ahead, determined to prepare our students for success in a society that will require the 6 C skills.

However, we are shackled by the traditional setting of our school, with small rooms designed to house groups of students seated at desks all day. **We need to develop more open, collaborative spaces that will better serve our vision for student learning.** Tom Murray, state and district digital learning director for the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org), states that "It really is a mindset shift. There's a disconnect if the (school) spaces don't practice what we preach in terms of the 21st-century skill set." We are currently in that state of disconnect. Many of the instructional strategies and programs we need to implement for students require more space and flexibility than is currently available. (In fact, we are running tight on space even for a traditional educational structure.)

In a traditional classroom, students are seated at individual desks quietly responding to teacher direction and input. Just as the technology and tools available to our students have become mobile, so too should our learning spaces become more flexible. As we transform into a learning community that often encourages both formal and informal student interactions, research in many formats, hands-on experiences, and student creation opportunities both in collaborative teams and individually, we need to differentiate our learning spaces. **As we build students' capacity to own their own learning, make choices in their learning plan, and show what they know, we need a space that provides opportunity for student movement, research material options, and room for teamwork using a variety of materials and tools.**

The Innovation Team is leading the charge to pursue the potential of a new building at Walnut Acres that would provide open, flexible space for student learning. Since it would be a place for student collaboration and communication, we are using the working title of Colab for the building.

The Colab Dream

The Colab is envisioned as a 21st-century library with rooms for groups of various sizes to complete a multitude of tasks, including, but not limited to, producer/consumer technology learning and application activities on a variety of devices, research using books or technology devices, student collaborative projects, hands-on science experiments, maker space activities, robotics, coding, green-screening, and art. Ideally, the large main room would have a light, inviting feel with books on walls and comfy, student-movable furniture. Various rooms sized for 10 to 34 students would open from the large room. We want to avoid labeling each room by function, because rooms would be multi-purpose.

Students or small groups of children sent by their teachers to work on a project, whole classes with teacher, and even entire grade levels could use the Colab for an endless variety of purposes. Our current library would be moved to the space, and science lab classes could be housed there, as well as art classes. A variety of technology devices would be available for technology skill development and application of those skills to student content assignments. The space would be ideal for project-based learning, which is a staple of a 21st-century school. Specialists such as our librarian, site tech, and science assistants, would "live" in the space and be available to learners.

Next Steps

There is an old saying that if your dream doesn't scare you, it's not big enough! Having said that, we have to consider the realities of our situation and see what is possible on our site. The building we envision would cost millions and could not be raised by the PFC. It would likely be funded through grants from corporations that choose to support 21st century learning.

The Innovation Team has received approval from the district to get a feasibility study completed for the Colab Project. The team has decided that the **next step is to form a feasibility committee to complete two goals:**

1. **Learn the facts about the function and potential costs of the Colab.**
2. **If the plan proceeds, find funding for the feasibility study,** which is estimated to be about \$28,000.

Mr. Jeff de Lucia has agreed to lead the team along with Mr. Todd Silva. **If you are willing to join the feasibility team to research these dual goals, please contact me at 939-1333 or via e-mail at dowdc@mdusd.org.** Anyone who is

interested in helping with this process is welcome to join. We are particularly eager to get help from those who are familiar with the construction and planning process as well as those who have experience with capital campaign fundraising.

Intradistrict Transfers

The district has asked me to remind you that intradistrict applications were available beginning 10/15/15 and that the **application window will close on 1/15/16 for 1st-11th grades and 3/1/16 for TK and K**. You may pick up an application in our school office or at the district office. The application is also available on the district website at mdusd.org. **No applications** for an intradistrict transfer **will be accepted after the deadlines** specified.

Please remember that all current intradistrict transfer students remain at Walnut Acres through 5th grade. If Foothill is not your home school and you wish to attend there, you will need to follow the intradistrict transfer process.

Best Wishes

George Eliot wrote that, "It is never too late to be what you might have been." Guiding our children provides a wonderful opportunity to enrich our own lives. May 2016 be a year in which each of us continues to become the best that we can be as we partner to support our children's learning in a safe, nurturing, engaging and challenging environment.

Respectfully,

Colleen Dowd
Walnut Acres Principal

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