

The Neighborhood and Schools Collaborative

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I know I am not alone when I say that I value the assets this neighborhood has to offer. The tree-lined streets wind through and weave together the landscape where we all live. We enjoy an abundance of parks and spaces for us to walk, bike ride, meet for a game of tennis or bocci ball, choose a book from a “Little Free Library,” or play and picnic with our guests, friends, and children.

In addition to these assets, and unique to our neighborhood, are three schools that share residency within its boundaries. Nestled into the contours of our streets and thoroughfares are Monte Vista Elementary School, Colton Middle School, and Monterey High School. All three schools built in the early to mid 1900’s share a rich educational legacy marking the vision and values of Monterey’s civic leaders to offer quality education for their growing community and youth. History also documents how these schools and the neighborhood have enjoyed close relationships, living side-by-side as neighbors, where the integration of both has been seamless and supportive.

And so, it is in the spirit of continuing this rich history of neighborhood stewardship for our schools, that a working group was formed last September with neighborhood, high school, and school district representation with goals to broaden understanding of the unique roles each play in supporting students in their educational pursuits, deepen our relationships to serve as reciprocal resources for one another, and create a transparent and interactive communication platform from which to exercise those goals. This group is called the [*Neighborhood and Schools Collaborative*](#).

Founding members of the collaborative are Beth Wodecki, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary School Education, Thomas Newton, Principal of Monterey High School, Hans Jannasch, Neighborhood Representative and myself, Elizabeth Jannasch, Neighborhood Representative. The [mission statement](#) co-created by this group reads:

Participants of this group share a commitment to facilitate direct communication and collaboration among our neighborhood, our schools, the district office, and the school board for the well-being of our collective community.

The Collaborative has established monthly meetings to share ideas, answer questions and address issues of concern. Tom Newton shares a monthly Neighborhood Newsletter previewing school activities and home sporting events which is posted on the MVNA website, and we continue to reach out to district superintendent PK Diffenbaugh and our elected board trustees to join in relevant conversations around issues of mutual interest to neighbors and their schools.

One such issue has been the continued impact of light trespass from LED campus lighting for neighbors living closest to the high school. While the school had changed out incandescent bulbs around campus for the more energy-efficient LED light, the unshielded lights are three times brighter with nightly campus illumination and the flooding of light into homes facing the school until they are shut off at 10:30 pm.

Neighbors' requests to address this issue with the district came to the attention of the Collaborative and an evening walk around campus was accomplished March 9th with superintendent PK Diffenbaugh and Amanda Whitmire, board trustee. The meet-up resulted in a district order for campus lights with shielding, reduced height light poles in the campus quad, and the addition of motion detection sensors to light pathways for janitor work, safety, and security in the evening hours.

Most recently we collaborated with Monterey High School to offer neighbors an overview of its programs and a student-led tour of the grounds prior to their annual spring Open House, April 21st. Hosted by principal Tom Newton, program representatives articulated the goals of the academies and CTE (Career Technical Education) programs the high school offers. The event showcased many of the academic achievements of the students, artwork, music, dance, and theater performances.



The importance of effective communication between our neighborhood, our schools, and MPUSD, has never been more critical for our youth. Even without taking into consideration the stresses imposed on them during this pandemic, our youth are experiencing far greater challenges in accessing a robust and progressive education. An ever-growing number of students are economically disadvantaged or homeless (nearly 50% of MHS students) and require assistance from their schools for food, supplies, and mental health support to keep their life goals and

dreams in sight. The historically common distribution of public sponsored bond monies for school rehabilitation is a luxury of the past, and an unlikely source of funding for our schools in the future.

The Collaborative recognizes the unique, and equally essential roles neighbors, schools and district representatives have in caring for our youth. Neighbors are resources for their school community. The possibilities are endless to incorporate the diverse skill sets of neighbors to enhance the educational experience of students by supporting them to identify their passions and broaden their awareness of career opportunities.

Our schools have a finger on the pulse of the daily challenges our students experience. With precious little time, our high school leaders are challenged to help them negotiate a forward-leaning education in safe and secure facilities with the tools of education that will prepare them for work and career options upon graduation. In attending a recent school play and walking the campus with students during their open house event, it was encouraging to see and feel the energy and enthusiasm of our youth for the future.

Our unified school district is challenged to provide leadership for all the schools, their administrative staff, and students under their jurisdiction. This, at a time where the demand for essential infrastructure updates face an exponential rise in costs to stay ahead of our aging schools. Attending an in-person or virtual board meeting has been informative, increasing my awareness of the issues of concern for all schools in the district.

Statements from MPUSD leadership found on their website speak to a *process* that connects both neighborhoods and schools by welcoming “community driven solutions for local students. . .with local control and accountability of provisions to ensure the proper use of funds.” The fourth goal of our elected Board of Trustees states they are charged to, “communicate budget priorities and allocations clearly and transparently to the public and ensure an inclusive budget creation process that engages multiple stakeholders.” These statements of intention recognize the importance of sharing the priorities and projects of our schools with the communities they serve. The Collaborative seeks to deepen our neighborhood engagement in this process with our schools and district leadership.

While we might easily count the more visible assets we enjoy in our neighborhood, perhaps more elusive to measure are the less visible assets that *we* create in this neighborhood where we live. Because how can we measure the value of the stewardship we extend to one another as we meet-and-greet on our daily walks, share news in over-the-fence chats, or lend a hand to a neighbor in need? These assets not only grow a neighborhood but create the culture that defines it.

To that end, preserving the long-standing stewardship our neighborhood has with its three schools has never been more important. The Neighborhood and Schools Collaborative welcomes your questions, issues of concern, ideas, and resources for our schools. That we as a neighborhood have always taken an active role and interest in how our schools grow, is a true measure of the care we have for our schools and the youth who attend them. Please send your ideas to my email below.

In addition, the Collaborative invites our school, district, and elected board partners to reach out to neighbors as well, as we move forward together to collaborate in caring “for the well-being of our collective community” and the youth who need us now.

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