

# Welcoming Practices in Military-Connected School Districts

Spring 2017

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## District Leaders Look to Continue Focus on Welcoming

With the *Welcoming Practices* Consortium officially ending later this year, leaders in the five participating districts are reflecting on how the partnership with USC has benefitted students, families and educators, and looking ahead to how they will continue to make all students feel welcome and supported in school.

A full report on the Consortium will be released later this year, but here's a preview of what some district leaders think about how the partnership has led to lasting changes in how they support students through transitions.

In the Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD), for example, the partnership and focus on welcoming led to creating a military family advocate position. In that role, Tina Archer is the main point of contact for military families. Dr. Francisco Escobedo, superintendent of CVESD, adds that the grant also prompted the district to hire school social workers and to think about improving services for other groups of students, such as children in foster care.

In the Temecula Valley Unified School District (TVUSD), the centrally located Welcome Center not only gives new families a place to find information on registration and school programs, but has also become a place where they can find connections to other resources in the community. In addition, the work has improved the way TVUSD staff members work together.

"Before the grant, we kind of worked in isolation," says Diana Damon White, the director of special programs for TVUSD. "Now that we've pulled this welcoming practices mindset together, we are working much closer that we ever have before."

In the Fallbrook Union High School District and the Oceanside Unified School District, Student-to-Student (S2S), Junior Student-to-Student (JS2S) and other welcoming routines will continue to focus on relieving the stress that comes with changing schools.

"The families and students have expressed such appreciation for the friendly phone call welcoming them to the school, the guided campus tours, breakfast on their first day, and the monthly luncheons," says Margaret Malek, with OUSD. "All their typical fears about starting a new school were quickly alleviated when the JS2S/S2S ambassadors walked them to their classes, introduced them to their teachers, and made plans to have lunch with them on their first day."

The districts have also learned from each other and shared best practices. "We really came together as districts when we created the app," Escobedo says, referring to [WelConnect](#), which connects families to school, district and military resources. "The beauty of it is they can download the

app and do a lot of homework before they arrive.”

Dr. Justin Cunningham, superintendent of the Bonsall Unified School District, adds that the app inspired his district to increase mobile services for families.

“We literally changed our whole student information system to work with the app,” Cunningham says. “That has been a real benefit to our population.”

Additional thoughts on the impact of *Welcoming Practices* will be compiled in a report this fall.

## **April is Month of the Military Child**

April is always an exciting month throughout the Consortium as schools hold events to recognize military children for the positive contributions they make to their families, schools and communities. Here are just a few examples of what’s happening this month in the *Welcoming Practices* districts.

- Students in the Military Ambassador Club at Wolf Canyon Elementary in CVESD visited Naval Base San Diego to learn about life in the Navy. Their tour included the Littoral Combat Ship School House and the base's fire station.
- Events at McMillin Elementary School include a military family movie night, a Month of the Military Child kickoff assembly and a military family breakfast, featuring a speaker from the Military Child Education Coalition.
- Throughout CVESD, schools will distribute purple wristbands that say Military Child 2017, “I Serve Too!” along with certificates paid for through the *Welcoming Practices* grant. Schools are also encouraging students to participate in a t-shirt design contest. Olympic View Elementary and Camarena Elementary will ask students and staff to wear purple on “purple up” days.
- Bonsall West Elementary School, in cooperation with the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton School Liaison Program, will host at “Tell Me a Story Night” for military children and their families.
- Sullivan Middle School, also in BUSD, will hold "Bring a Hero to School Day" in which military parents can join their child for lunch and stay for a military family appreciation pep rally.
- The events at Fallbrook High School will include opportunities for military students to have lunch with a staff member who has had a positive impact on them and a scavenger hunt in which civilian and military-connected students team up to compete for a prize. There will also be an obstacle course and opportunities for students to sing songs that honor the military. Challenge coins, Month of the Military bracelets and prizes will also be distributed to students.
- Pauba Valley Elementary School in TVUSD scheduled a Purple Up day for April 14.
- Halecrest Elementary in CVESD is asking families to donate photos of service members for a hero wall. The school will also display a world map showing where military-connected students have lived. Every Friday will be Purple Up day this month, and on April 17, the school has scheduled a Military Parent Coffee.

## **Reminder: California Healthy Kids Survey**

Every year, the [California Healthy Kids Survey](#) (CHKS) gathers students' views on a wide range of health behaviors and school climate issues. The youth risk and resilience survey—a project of the California Department of Education in partnership with WestEd—is considered a critical piece of identifying areas of strength and needs among students. The survey also includes a question on whether students have a family member in the military so that school leaders can view results specifically for military-connected students.

*Welcoming Practices* districts are currently administering the survey. Students in the TVUSD and Fallbrook began taking the surveys in February, with OUSD and BUSD following in March. CVESD was expected to begin the week of April 3.

The [California School Parent Survey](#) is a companion to the CHKS and gathers parents' input on the same issues. Schools should remind parents to take the survey, which will be available through a link on districts' websites. Schools are also encouraging staff members to take the [California School Climate Survey](#), which provides valuable information on staff members' perceptions of their schools and their training needs.

Districts use the surveys to learn more about the health and behavior of children at school and district levels, to understand parents' and staff members' views and to seek grant funding and plan programs.

### **Chula Vista Students Get 'Anchored4Life'**

Students at Halecrest Elementary and Camarena Elementary in the Chula Vista Elementary School District are among the first to participate in a new transition and resilience training program created through a partnership between The Trevor Romain Company and the U.S. Navy.

A bestselling children's author, Trevor Romain writes self-help books for children, and has worked with the Department of Defense and the USO to create resources for military-connected children and their families.

Through Anchored4Life, currently a pilot program, students will be trained to lead clubs that provide support and activities for students going through transitions. Click [here](#) for more information on [The Trevor Romain Company](#).

### **Bullying Prevention Conference Planned**

The San Diego County Suicide Prevention Council's School Collaborative, a project of [Community Health Improvement Partners](#) (CHIP) will be host "Inclusion through Kindness and Compassion," a one-day summit supporting LGBTQ youth. Click [here](#) for registration information. The event is being presented in partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education and the International Bullying Prevention Association.

The conference will focus on how to create safe schools and inclusive environments. In addition to guest speakers, local organizations will be providing resources for participants. The event is open to school administrators, teachers, counselors and other staff members.

- Date: Friday, April 28, 2017
- Time: 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Location: Marina Village Conference Center, 1936 Quivira Way, SD 92109

The bullying conference extends the work that the School Collaborative has already been doing to support LGBTQ students in San Diego-area school districts. The Collaborative recently held a Suicide Prevention Resource Fair focusing on LGBTQ students at the North County Regional Education Center. Click [here](#) for additional resources and information on future meetings.

### **Learning Leadership at the Happiest Place on Earth**

Members of Fallbrook High School's Student-2-Student/Helping Hands Club learned some leadership skills recently when they participated in Disneyland's Approach to Leadership and Teamwork program, part



of the Disney Youth Education Series provided for students at both the Florida and California parks. Students participated in hands-on activities that teach teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They also learned "ice-breaker" activities they can use to help welcome new students to their school. In their evaluations of the program, the students reported that the activities helped them further their leadership skills as well as communication and team building.

### Santa Margarita JS2S Club Hosts ‘Funday’



Student-2-Student and Junior Student-to-Student (JS2S) clubs work hard all year to help new students feel welcome and connected in their new schools. Members of the JS2S club at Santa Margarita hosted a schoolwide Friday ‘Funday’ in March as a way to celebrate their hard work so far this year. Students had the opportunity to interact with peers they don’t normally get to see in the classroom.

Old-fashioned sack races (left) were among the games and activities scheduled during the day. The students also enjoyed snow cones and danced to live music.

### Oceanside’s Youth Success Week

School leaders and representatives from community organizations and agencies throughout Oceanside gathered in late January for a weeklong event focusing on the 8 Keys of Excellence. Held in partnership with the Community Alliance for Youth Success and Oceanside Promise, the event included activities and programs across the city related to the 8 Keys philosophy. Throughout the week, students and families heard from guest speakers, participated in community art activities, and attended the youth success festival, which included live performances, vendors and other activities.



### WelConnect Facebook Ad Campaign

Facebook users in the San Diego area might recently have noticed an ad for the WelConnect app when they check up on what their friends are doing. The new WelConnect ad campaign is designed to reach a wider audience outside of the school districts and attract users that can still benefit from what the app offers, such as information on programs and services for students and their families. Through these efforts, there has already been an increase in downloads of the app.



## Presentation at National School Social Work Conference

Diana Pineda, project director for *Welcoming Practices* and an adjunct lecturer at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, presented at the 20th Annual National School Social Work Conference, held in San Diego, March 22-25. She provided an overview of *Welcoming Practices* and how it meets the needs of students making transitions between schools.

## Coming Soon! New Guidebooks

The *Welcoming Practices* team is close to releasing two more guidebooks that will help educators improve school climate and monitor their efforts to create schools in which students feel safe, supported and able to focus on learning.

Now in the final stages of production, both books are being published by Oxford University Press and are expected to be released later this year.

The first, *Welcoming Practices: Creating Schools that Support Students and Families in Transition*, provides background on how changing schools affects students across their K-12 years and offers a variety of practical approaches for helping students—especially those who have experienced multiple transitions—feel welcome in their new schools and form connections to students, teachers and others in the school community. The book includes a focus on how technology, such as the WelConnect app, is being used to help students and their parents find the resources and information they need even before they enroll their new schools. The book also discusses the importance of welcoming the entire family, not just students.

The second book, *Addressing School Bullying, Safety, Climate, and Social Emotional Learning Through Monitoring and Mapping: A Practical, Data-Driven Empowerment Approach*, advocates for an ongoing feedback system in which school leaders collect, review and discuss input from students, parents and staff members to improve the school environment. Instead of reacting to headlines about school violence or making decisions based on old data, school and district leaders can use surveys, focus groups, mapping and a variety of other methods to gather and analyze current information on what students are experiencing and which students are most affected. The book covers the types of questions school leaders need to ask about their own schools and strategies for capturing the voices of students, parents, and staff members.

