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Dear San Mateo County school community members,

During this week of Thanksgiving as we reflect on our many blessings, my heart is full of gratitude for our SMCOE staff and partners who work with passion and heart to create and uplift San Mateo County as a child-centered place.



There are too many to name, but these partners include our public and private school teams, including teachers, administrators, and other site and district employees; early learning and child care workers; the County of San Mateo with its many dedicated leaders and staff; nonprofits that support our students and families; municipal governments and agencies; and most especially parents and guardians who, despite many challenges over the past year, show up for their young people every day, in big ways and small.

I would like to give a special shout-out to the school teams who have been asked to do so much, yet continue to rise to the challenge in support of our students, ensuring they have what they need to learn, thrive, and succeed. These committed school teams have stepped up to meet the educational and mental health needs of our students who have been deeply impacted by the pandemic. They dedicate themselves to making our schools safe and supportive places where students feel belonging.

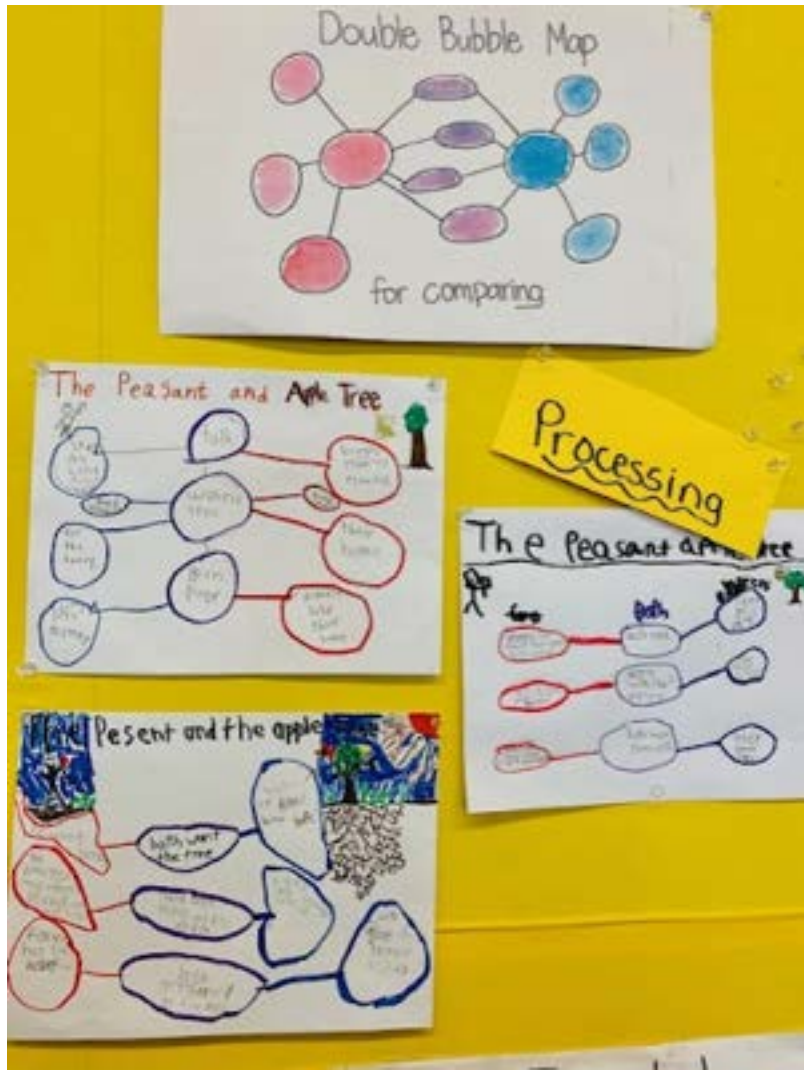
This fall, with renewed spirit, I have made it a priority to again visit schools, meet with teachers and staff, and observe and talk with students. It's a great way to tap into hope and optimism for the future. As a Thanksgiving gift, I want to share the story of a recent visit I made to Clifford School in the Redwood City School District. That experience continues to inspire me about not only what is possible, but what is happening today in the schools across San Mateo County.

I wish you a restorative and joyful Thanksgiving and offer my humble thanks for all you do for the children and youth of San Mateo County.

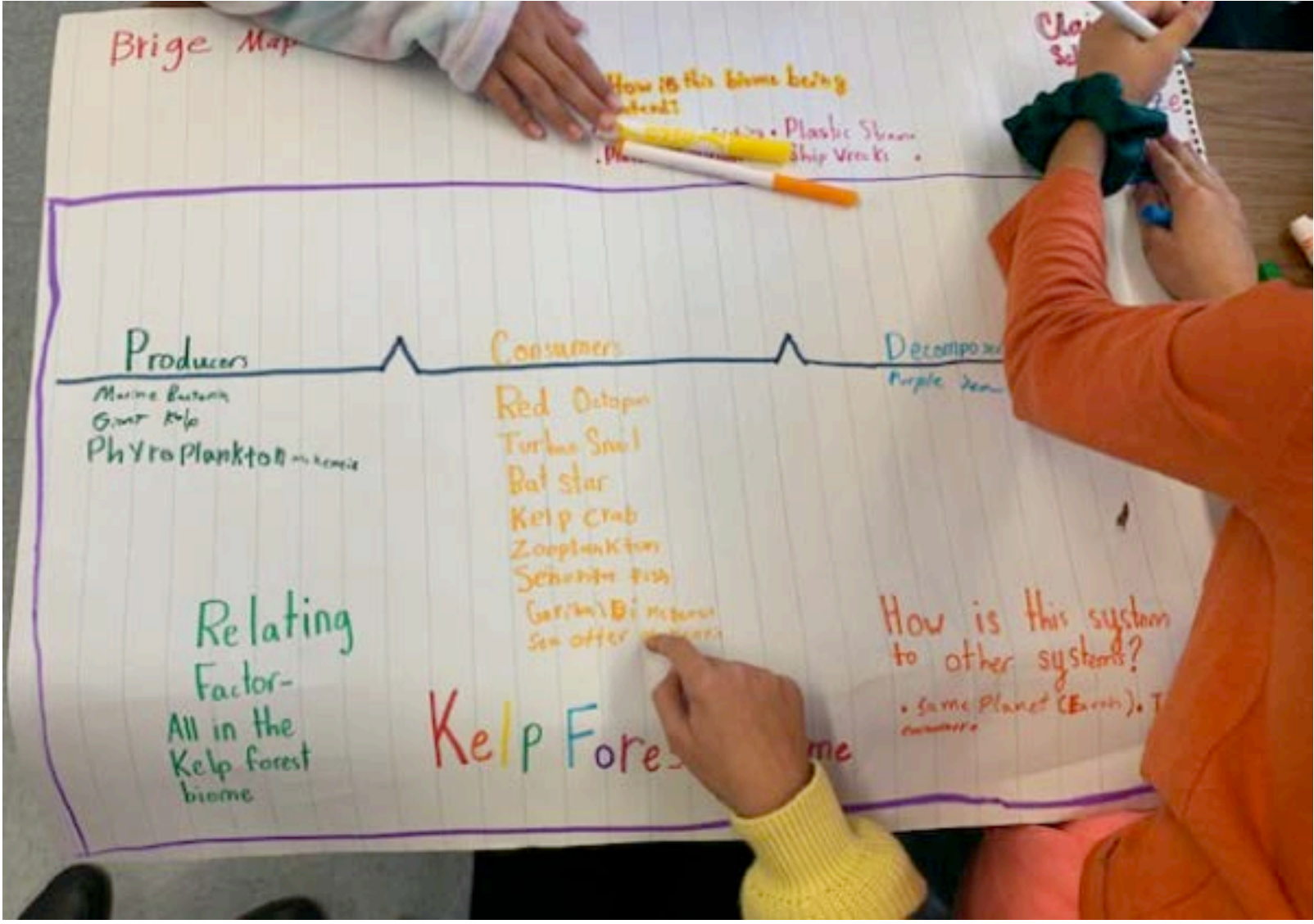
*Nancy Magee*

REDWOOD CITY'S CLIFFORD SCHOOL MODELS  
STUDENT EMPOWERMENT

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to visit classrooms in Clifford School's National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUE) Lab School program and meet with teachers and administrators about this priority initiative of the Redwood City School District. I am still basking in the glow of that inspiring visit. Not only were the third- and fifth-grade students fully engaged in their learning, but the classrooms exuded joy and purpose. The teachers and administrators shared how this program has renewed their love of teaching and energizes them every day.



In the third-grade classroom, the students were discussing arrays and algorithms as part of their math work. Instead of memorizing times tables, they were digging into understanding what multiplication means, with obvious benefits for higher-level math down the road. Instead of the teacher imparting content, the students worked collaboratively to solve problems and answer questions. They relied on thinking maps to help them understand concepts and used their personal learning journals to explore ideas and reflect on their learning. The students were curious, engaged, and empowered to ask and answer questions of each other. This pedagogy centers student voice, while the teachers masterfully facilitate the students' curiosity.



In the fifth-grade classrooms, students were discussing the kelp forest biome and ecosystems. They worked in small groups to identify and categorize the associated food chains that exist within the biome. The students are adept at understanding and using various thinking maps, which they reported help them focus their thoughts and work through questions and assignments. They also demonstrated how they use singing and dancing definitions to remember key pieces of information. In addition to our asking students about their work, the students were curious about our visit and eager to show off their learning skills.



The NUE approach, which includes identifying and activating student strengths, building relationships, eliciting high intellectual performances, situating learning in the lives of students, and amplifying student voice, was clearly demonstrated in the classrooms and in conversations with teachers and administrators. The Clifford teachers are keenly focused on the instructional strategies and reported they work with any curriculum. The teachers are also excited about the responsiveness of their students to the NUE accelerated learning program. At the core of the work is equity, and the NUE approach is helping the Redwood City School District provide all students with what they need to succeed.



Redwood City School District understands the most recent state test scores reflect the many challenges students and their families have navigated over the past two years, but they remain committed to changing these results and ensuring their students succeed both academically and in life.

The energy and enthusiasm from Clifford's teachers and students is truly contagious. I look forward to following the progress of Clifford's students as well as students from the other schools in the district implementing the NUE approach, including Taft and Roy Cloud.

