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MEF donations strengthen distance learning

By Jenn Freedman



A Rheem Elementary student prepares for the first day of distance-learning. Photo Casey Sproul

While classrooms look quite different this fall, school is back in full swing. During this time of distance learning, as well as hybrid learning (in-person and virtual) down the road, local support of public schools is just as critical as ever.

Thanks to donations from parents, community members and businesses, Moraga Education Foundation (MEF) supplements state funding to ensure that Moraga schools can provide a high-quality, well-rounded education by using these grants to fund the areas of academics, enrichment, wellness, professional development, STEAM, and now pandemic response, enhanced distance learning, and diversity and inclusion programming. Specifically, donations fund teacher aides, reading tutors (elementary), writing aides (middle), counselors, wellness centers, college/career counseling, art, music, physical education, librarians, and safety equipment. The programs and staff funded by MEF donations are crucial to schools whether students are distance learning or in the classroom.

MEF has granted \$ \$2.45 million to the Moraga School District and Campolindo in the 2020-21 academic year. These grants have aided the COVID-19 response and distance learning in vital ways.

For example, this year's professional development for teachers has focused on teaching virtually, understanding student social/emotion needs, and racial and cultural diversity. Fifth-grade teacher Clare Fallon at Camino Pablo Elementary explains, "The donations made to MEF allow me to grow and become a better teacher in so many ways. With the changes that have unfolded in our world since March, professional growth is even more vital than ever. The professional development opportunities offered to teachers in Moraga are current to the changes of education and society. They enable me to better understand how to help my students academically and emotionally."

MEF grants also fund classroom materials like subscriptions for interactive tutorials in all science classes. Campolindo science teacher Roxanna Jackman explains, "We have been able to purchase subscriptions from Pivot interactive tutorials. These subscriptions allow our students to do experiments and change variables and gather data in our Living Earth, Chemistry and the Earth, and Physics in the Universe courses, as well as our AP courses."

Plus, the academic support staff (tutors, aides, and academic counselors) has been instrumental in the success of distance learning. Suzanne Tom, first-grade teacher at Los Perales, explains, "Our reading tutors provide reading intervention for my little guys (via Zoom) who are struggling to make benchmark levels. With their support, along with having family support at home, a lot of times it's just the little lift that they need to get them where they need to be. And they feel so good when they can read at benchmark."

Rheem second-grade teacher Angela Guidi adds, "What remains constant during this time of change is my classroom aide, Mrs. Hardin. She is integral to us as we utilize the 'breakout room' function on Zoom, which allows us to work in small groups with the students. But to do that, we need another adult to supervise the rest of the students."

In addition, student wellness and social/emotional learning are indispensable during this time of uncertainty and hardship. MEF grants fund counselors, who support students through individual, small group, and classroom programs. "This is especially important now more than ever during distance learning, when we all need help and support connecting with each other, and coping with how school looks a lot different this year," explains Emily Navolio, third-grade teacher at Camino Pablo.

Finally, MEF grants have been used to fund critical safety equipment like masks, sneeze guards, face shields, hand sanitizer, sanitizer floor stands, outdoor hand washing stations, goggles, thermometers, toilet seat covers, HVAC filters, disposable gloves, and disinfectant room foggers, and school learning tools like Chrome books, hotspots, Zoom subscriptions, online assessment systems, and webcams.

MEF is currently raising funds for next year's grants, and while they accept donations throughout the year, their annual Week of Giving is Oct. 5-11. "Our local public schools rely on community support to be among

the best in the state. The Week of Giving is a perfect time to make a donation to MEF, a donation that will preserve the high standard of education we have come to expect in Moraga. Our hope is that everyone who benefits from the excellent Moraga public schools-parents and community members-will donate at a level that is right for them," says MEF president Lisa Brown.

To donate, go to www.moragaeducation.org.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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