

Dr. Michelle Rodriguez

Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, Superintendent of Schools in Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) is an inspired leader of uncommon ability engaging the Pajaro Valley educational community in an authentic, transparent and intentional transformation process to support development of the whole child and to prepare all students to be successful in life including college and career. With a focus on equity for vulnerable student populations, Dr. Rodriguez has been dedicated to low-income districts, both urban and rural, for 27 years.

Over the past four years, Dr. Rodriguez has used a deep understanding of change management complexities, the value of innovation, a commitment to share evidence and data of students' success and the importance of stakeholder engagement to produce forward momentum in the largest school district in Santa Cruz County. This momentum is supported by a broad range of collaborative community partner organizations (PVCHT, PVPSA, Salud Para La Gente, SHFB, Kaiser Permanente, CASA, Food What!?, Cabrillo College, UCSC and others) that collectively form an ecosystem and brain trust for PVUSD. The level of collaboration, commitment and cross-sector work among partners in this community is paralleled in few public-school districts. With these partners, Dr. Rodriguez affirms the strengths and capacities of students while embracing the powerful responsibility to expand the definition of student success to honor their linguistic, navigational, aspirational and familial capital. She also consistently underscores the alignment between the public health and whole child educational goals of improving cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of youth. This focus on community collaboration resulted in Kaiser-supported implementation of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation (AHG) Program at 15 PVUSD schools. AHG School Wellness Teams drive programming that supports healthy eating and active living for students, staff and at their school sites.

Dr. Rodriguez has received recognition at state and national levels for her visionary educational leadership and thinking. She was selected by CA State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond, to serve on two of his transition committees working to reimagine policies and goals in the areas of: Bilingual Education and Closing the Achievement Gap. Last year Dr. Rodriguez was selected to join The League of Innovative Schools, a national network of public school districts (114 Districts in 34 states) who reflect the diversity of public education and share common challenges and pursuits as they implement innovative, data-driven, equitable,

technology focused and student-centered initiatives. Most recently, she now sits on the California Department of Education's Comprehensive State Literacy Plan Task Force to develop a PreK-12 literacy framework. As a national Broad Scholar, she engages in deep professional dialogue with a cohort of educational researchers and practitioners who are passionate and inspired to grow high-performing districts and organizations that demand excellence and equity for all students.

Resilient Leadership in Response to COVID-19

At the end of January 2020, Dr. Rodriguez began communicating with the County of Santa Cruz Public Health Division around COVID-19. As a leader who designs from the head and the heart, she began formulating an agile, compassionate and systemic response protocol that valued at its core continued student growth, authentic collaboration and the health and safety of the entire PVUSD educational community. PVUSD's response to the pandemic has featured a number of successes:

- Early and consistent tracking of local, state and national expert guidance and data
- Launch of student distance and packet learning , Teacher and Community/Student Technology Hotlines and distance learning resources for families
- Distribution of Chromebooks and internet hotspots to students and collaboration with internet providers to close the digital divide for families
- Provision of free school meal services for any child age 1-18 and collaboration with SHFB to feed families
- Maintenance of community partnership to ensure strength in the local whole child resources network for students and families
- Regular and transparent communications to the PVUSD community across many platforms including creation of "Ask Dr. Rodriguez" engagement and communication campaign
- Sound operational protocols for sanitizing and disinfecting equipment and facilities

PVUSD by the Numbers

USD covers a 150 square mile area and serves 20,106 students in the communities of Watsonville, Aptos, Freedom, Aromas and Pajaro. The majority (66%) of students are English learners, 83% are low-income, 10% are migrant, and 14% receive special education services. In addition, PVUSD serves 59 foster youth and 16% of students meet criteria for homelessness due to multiple families living under one roof. PVUSD employs 2,690 full and part-time staff to achieve its mission.

(dated April 14, 2020)