



**Message from Superintendent Skelly:  
English Teachers – Watchful “Guides” Who Help  
Teens Put Emotions on Paper  
*December 20, 2017***

Dear SMUHSD Family:

Everyone loves a good story. Decompressing from the holiday festivities curled up with a compelling tale feels like a great way to ring in the New Year.

This past week I received a therapeutic dose of compelling storytelling through the writing of our students. I attended the class readings of students in a creative writing course in our District. The evening event was held in an art gallery in San Mateo with teachers, supportive friends, family, and school administrators in the audience.

Most of the readings were memoirs about personal experiences – relationships with family and parents in particular, events at school and with friends, lessons learned from sports and times of personal discovery. While some of the accounts were humorous, many had a cathartic element – students shared their pain mixed with the strength and resilience they had gained. While it was clear that the experiences shared had often seared the student, the challenge of writing about it seemed to provide a large measure of healing.

The psychologist Carl R. Rogers said that “the most personal is the most universal.” The students shared tales about love, siblings, school, and other topics that resonated deeply with me and with all in attendance. There was something in the telling, though mixed with humor and pathos, that added a redemptive quality to the event. At the end of the night, I asked several students to send me their work so I could share it with family and friends in the hope that it would have a salutary effect on them.

English teachers have a tough job. It isn’t just the sheer time teaching English requires, but it is also the enormity of the task. I sat in on a meeting of District English teachers some time ago as they discussed the scope and sequence of their classes. Listening to the topics they tackle in class, the literature they deploy, and the various types of writing they assign, I was reminded of the out-sized role a masterfully taught English class can have in shaping the experience of our high school students. Our young storytellers, like all our students, benefited from the guidance of careful, experienced and caring English teachers – the watchful “guides” who help them put young teenage emotions on paper and in perspective.

English teachers have a window into the soul of their students. Our young people pour out some of their most personal thoughts in their journal entries and comments during class discussions. Much is revealed, and can be healed in an English class.

*December 2017 Holiday Message from SMUHSD Superintendent Skelly*

I always knew I lacked the wisdom, empathy and judgment to teach English, but I'm thankful for those willing to take up the challenge.

Our students' holiday gift is seventeen days of rest and recharging between their last semester exam and the start of the second semester on Tuesday, January 9.

Here's hoping you and your student have a chance to enjoy the wisdom and potential healing from a well-written tale or benefit from the chance to reflect on one's "wild and precious life."

Sincerely,

Kevin Skelly, Ph.D.  
Superintendent  
San Mateo Union High School District

