

SLOCOE e-News



Monthly News from the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education



A full rainbow arches over the Special Education offices at SLOCOE.

[photo by AJ Alsup]

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Vaccines Bring Hope to Schools

by James Brescia, County Superintendent

Last year in March, I wrote about NCAA Basketball's "March Madness," and its metaphorical equivalent in education, as we begin to close out one year while planning for the next year. The Novel Coronavirus adds to the madness.

The San Luis Obispo County Office of Education continues to work with all school districts, charters, and childcare centers throughout the county to formalize plans, vaccination schedules, and protective measures. We regularly brief all agency leads, and facilitate meetings with public health. Thank you for doing your part to keep our community safe by following public health guidelines. I anticipate we will be able to vaccinate all employees requesting a vaccination within 8-10 weeks.

The Governor, in a statement released March 1 said, "There is no question that students learn best when they are together with their peers

and educators in a physically and emotionally safe school environment. Our schools need every resource possible to implement the layered safety measures that will facilitate a safe return to in-person learning for students, school staff, teachers, and their families."



We at SLOCOE and other school agencies take our responsibilities seriously, and provide information as soon as it is available. Please speak with your direct supervisor or with someone in Human Resources if you have questions. The [Mental Health Minutes](#) produced by our SLOCOE psychologists might also be helpful, and are much appreciated.

Thank you for your flexibility, patience and kindness.



~Jim Brescia

WHAT A TEAM! Dr. Brescia, Marisol Espino, Karla Knuckles, and Angela Simmons scheduled over 400 appointments on behalf of county teachers and eligible staff over a period of three days, making a lot of people very happy. The first round of appointments, for the first week of March, went to teachers and frontline staff contacted by school districts to call in for appointments. Our County Superintendent joined in the effort, to the surprise of more than a few callers, in order to better understand the process and to gauge its effectiveness. As more vaccines become available, more school staff will be eligible for vaccines, bringing long-awaited relief to schools and families in our county.



Meet AJ Alsup

Director, Information Technology Services

No one had any idea, when former IT Director Phil Trott retired and AJ Alsup arrived to lead SLOCOE's Information Technology Services, that a pandemic would make distance working and learning a major focus of 2020 and 2021. A dramatic increase in technology needs for SLOCOE's educational programs and staff, as well as more complicated security concerns, left little time for AJ to ease into his new role, or meet all of us face-to-face. Now that a full year has sped by, AJ can look back with pleasure



on many teaching moments as he equips staff to practice security awareness and feel increased confidence in solving some technology issues on their own.

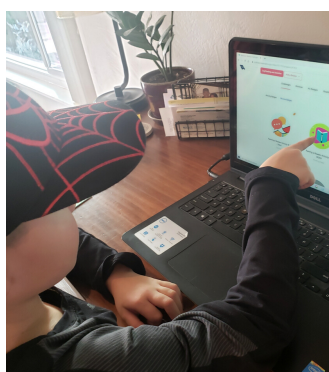
A native of San Diego, AJ says he drew some inspiration for his career in computer and software technology from his father, a physicist for the US Navy. As a result of his father's association with the Navy, the family's first stand-alone computer in the mid-70s was an IBM PC. AJ channeled his technological interests into a career as a software engineer in private industry in the Bay Area, where he met his wife Brendy. A desire to live in close proximity to his place of work and to kids' schools led AJ to accept a position with Templeton Unified, where he drew satisfaction from contributing to technology in the very schools his own children attended. The shift from private industry to education obviously hit a chord; after five years with Templeton Unified, AJ joined SLOCOE.

AJ and Brendy have seven children (two out of high school; three in high school; two in elementary school), along with a dog and a cat who were adopted from shelters. The family enjoys outdoor activities, including paddle-boarding, hiking, biking, and summer visits to Bass Lake and Lake Tahoe during pre-pandemic times. AJ and his family also share another interest, evidence of which will soon appear in his office, a love of Star Wars movies. Keep your eyes open for some fun and rare memorabilia when you visit! [AJ has familial connections to the producer of the two first films.]

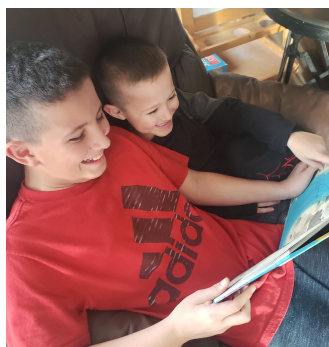
In the meantime, we can look forward to many good times ahead with AJ. Thanks for keeping us secure and high-functioning over this past year!

Beanstalk Reading Challenge for Young Children

Raising a Reader and the SLO County Library Bring Learning Fun to Kids



SLOCOE's Raising a Reader partnered with the SLO County Library to create an online Beanstalk Reading Challenge, a literacy-based program that offers fun and challenges in areas such as **Talk, Read, Sing, Write, Play and Create**. Children aged 3-5 earn online badges and tickets toward monthly prizes. Parents countywide can register their children online at: slolibrary.beanstalk.org/reader365.

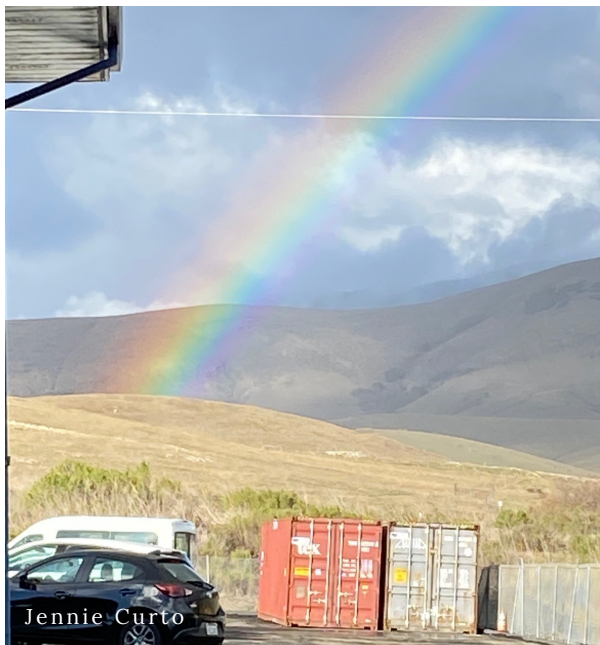


Warm responses from parents using Beanstalk with their young children include this from a mother, "I love my little reader. He is missing his preschool environment and is not doing great at the homeschool thing. When he joined Beanstalk, the challenges invited him to pick up a book, create, and write in playful ways. This gave me so much hope!"

A Facebook page for Raising a Reader provides updates on the drawings for prizes, and some Raising a Reader tips: www.facebook.com/RAR.SLO

NOTE: "Beanstalk," the name of the software platform, is not to be confused with "beanstalk" from the well known fairy tale of Jack and the Beanstalk.

Rainbows, PPE, and Other Photographic Sights



Dramatic skies, a lone deer, the un-loading of PPE supplies by Tom Wood, and rainbows, all captured by SLOCOE's walkers and shutterbugs.

ACTION FOR HAPPINESS: A colorful **Mindful March** calendar, from www.actionforhappiness.org, is full of daily activities one can enjoy alone or with family members. Check it out! [With thanks to Thomas Alvarez for sharing this resource.]

STAFF TRANSITIONS & NEWS

WELCOME TO SLOCOE!

Annie Donovan, Behavioral Health Specialist, Loma Vista Community School, Student Programs & Services

Jessie Rodriguez, Custodian, Operational Services

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

Elizabeth Howell, Instructional Specialist, Student Programs & Services