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MVESD sees academic growth

Scores rise despite multiple pandemic related challenges

By FRED MAYSON
THE DAILY NEWS

MOHAVE VALLEY — The Mohave Valley Elementary School District is one of six school districts in Arizona to see student proficiency in math grow during the past three years and one of the top four school districts in nation for reading growth, according to a Harvard research center.

The Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University, based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, compared fourth- through eighth- grade testing data in 29

states from 2019 to 2022 in math and reading.

The research converted the data to estimates gains of losses: a score of 1.00 representing a school year of student growth and -1.00 representing the loss of a school year of growth.

According to CEPR, the nationwide median school district lost the equivalent of half a year in math learning (-0.52 grade equivalents) and a quarter of a year in reading (-0.23 grade equivalents).

"The pandemic was like a band of tornadoes that swept across the country," said CEPR Faculty Director Thomas J. Kane. "Some



communities were left relatively untouched, while neighboring schools were devastated."

Math academic growth took the harder hit during the pandemic, with Arizona averaging

at a loss of seven months (-0.69 grade equivalents) of learning in math between 2019 and 2022.

MVESD, however, saw growth across the board.

Of the six Arizona school districts that saw academic gains in math during the three year period, MVESD recorded the highest growth at 0.61 grade equivalents, or about five-and-a-half months.

The next best Arizona school for math growth was the Fort Huachuca Accommodation District with a 0.23 — the remaining four Arizona school districts each gained 0.14 or lower.

Nearby school districts tended to follow the state math trends rather than mirror MVESD's performance.

Bullhead City School District saw the equivalent of about a five-and-a-half month loss (-0.59) in math and the Lake Havasu Unified School District saw the equivalent of about a seven-month loss (-0.78).

The only other Mohave County school district included in CEPR's scorecard, Kingman Unified School District, saw the equivalent of about a two-and-a-half month loss (-0.29).

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Overall, Arizona children fared much better in reading growth: the statewide loss averaged to less than a month (-0.06 grade equivalents).

However, MVESD didn't just do well in comparison to the state — the district was the fourth highest in the nation for learning growth with about a seven-and-a-half month gain (0.83).

"Our student learning success is attributed to our teachers and staff and their concern, caring and compassion for our students during this extremely challenging time," said MVESD Superintendent Cole Young. "Our focus, as a district, was not only to address the logistics of maneuvering instructional models during COVID but examining our instructional practices and be as effective as possible with our cur-

rent curricular resources."

Young said steps taken to ensure student growth included evaluating the district's curriculum, better understanding grade-level standards, focusing on being data-informed and reexamining the district's approach to student learning while growing as a professional learning community.

"Our teachers and staff believed in each other and, more importantly, our kids, families and community," Young said.

The top three school districts for reading growth in the nation were all Texas-based: Huntsville Independent School District with 1.13, Pleasanton Independent School District with 0.88 and Perryton Independent School District with 0.84.

Compared locally, BCSD lost just over a week of reading growth (-0.04) while KUSD gained about three weeks (0.08); LHUSD saw a loss of nearly three months (-0.32).

Young said the district will continue to address the learning gap, which is about three-and-a-half months for math and a month-and-a-half for reading per CEPR.

"Our continuous improvement efforts never rest," Young said. "We continue to challenge ourselves to provide the best educational opportunities for our students."

Young's best advice to other school districts struggling with learning gaps?

Listen to the kids.

"Our students come to us with access to information like never before experienced," he said. "We, as a district, have challenged ourselves to adapt to our students' style of learning and meet them where they are in their interests and passions. We still teach content, but how we do it is evolving and may look a little different, but it has improved learning, increased participation and decreased discipline."

Multiple grants on MVESD agenda

By **FRED MAYSON**
THE DAILY NEWS

MOHAVE VALLEY — A number of grants will be up for approval at tonight's Mohave Valley Elementary School District governing board meeting — with a explanation from the superintendent about why the district seeks so many.

The governing board meeting will be held at 6 p.m. at the Mohave Valley Elementary Professional Development Room, 1419 Willow Drive.

According to the meeting agenda, the presentation will discuss school funding in Arizona and how the school district addresses it.

"Arizona has been struggling with a severe lack of school funding for years, which has impacted the quality of education for students," the item description reads.

By seeking out many grants, the district aims to be "proactive" in addressing funding shortfalls.

"Our students can't wait," it reads, "and we have prioritized seeking funding in

many ways to provide pathways and opportunities to our current and future students."

There are four grants on the agenda for the governing board to approve:

- Approval of a five-year \$3.45 million federal grant to provide mental health services for students.

- Approval of a three-year \$300,000 school safety grant. The grant will fund a counselor position at Mohave Valley Junior High School and Camp Mohave Elementary School.

- Approval of the continuation of the Arizona K12 Center New Teacher Support Program grant. The two-year \$150,000 grant supports three mentor teachers to provide new teachers with year-long mentoring.

- Approval of a \$5,000 grant to provide an anonymous tip line at MVJHS through a five-year agreement with Anonymous Alerts.

Other items on the agenda:

- Approval of the Jumpstart Camp program, which will operate this July. The camp provides kindergarten and preschool students an abridged learning experience to help them transition to being in school.

- Entertain a presentation on the district's food services and whether to renew Chartwells' food services contract for the incoming year.

- Approval of new meal pricing for the incoming school year. The recommended increase are between 50c and 75c for both breakfast and lunch.

- Entertain a presentation on the district's mentorship program. The presentation will precede approval of the related grant.

- Approval a revision to the 2022-2023 budget.

- Acceptance of the district's single audit report findings.



Innovation Lab remodel does more than teach

By FRED MAYSON
THE DAILY NEWS

MOHAVE VALLEY — Esports, drones and 3D printing are just a handful of activities Mohave Valley Junior High School students can enjoy in the school's new Innovation Lab — and teachers say they are valuable learning tools.

The Mohave Valley Elementary School District held a postmortem Tuesday night about the Innovation Lab's ribbon-cutting ceremony at the district's regular governing board meeting.

Formerly the school's library, the

*"We have to engage
middle school students.
We have to make them
want to come to school."*

— Michael Ingerson

Innovation Lab remodel was a technology-based project built around student suggestions and feedback.

The ribbon cutting, held Dec. 20, had exhibits and demonstrations and "Shark Tank"-style pitches from Innovation students for VIP attendees as a sort of end-of-

semester culminating project.

Activities at the Innovation Lab include virtual reality, esports, flight simulators, 3D printing and drones.

"We have to engage middle school students. We have to make them want to come to school," said Innovation Lab teacher Michael Ingerson. "We as educators know that these things are tools."

According to Ingerson and fellow Innovation Lab teacher Patty McKenzie, students learned a wide variety of skills to show off, including how to write a

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business plan, business economics, graphic design for logos, website design and public speaking skills to create and present their "Shark Tank" pitch.

"I think the most powerful piece is that it was student-led. No adult talking at all," MVJHS Principal Charlotte Hansen said. "The students were feeling super confident in their specialty that they have and we are so excited for that taste of what their future is going to be."

Outside of prepping for the event, students were given games and activities to encourage cooperation with other students, learning to engineer new ideas and work independently.

McKenzie said there were no units in the lab's first semester, but that education focused on "using skills we think they needed."

"Our mission is to engage the students," McKenzie said. "We tried to integrate a lot of the core standards because that is another mission of the Innovation Lab."

The student ambassadors selected for the event were not exclusively "all straight-A students," McKenzie said, as some were chosen to encourage their personal growth instead.

"The students we took chances on — I'm going to give you one example of that with one of my own students," aeronautics teacher David Huggins said. "Her name is Neveah This was an eye-opening moment for her. She has come back from her winter break after this with an absolutely astounding amount of confidence."

"She needed this. I hope we see this pay off with all our students."

Their success at the ribbon cutting is reflected in more places than just in the lab.

According to Ingerson, an eighth-grade teacher said she was amazed her English language arts students from the Innovation Lab already knew some of the concepts she had just started teaching in a new unit.

Specifically, the lab students had learned the rhetorical triangle to formulate their "Shark Tank" pitches earlier in the year.

"When we can do that, the kids can see how these skills are relevant," Ingerson said. "It's not just something I do in ELA and then I turn it off and walk away from it."

The vision for the lab is to incorporate more collaboration across school disciplines, staff and students going forward.

Ingerson said there also are plans in place to make the Innovation Lab more personalized to each student now that the ribbon cutting is beyond them.

Although units were not used in the first semester, now students will be able to select units based on their interests, which will allow the program to keep student achievement ongoing for returning lab students without repeating the materials and lessons new lab students will endure.

Ingerson described the plan as "a truly student-driven experience."



MVESD board to discuss campus safety

Daily News

MOHAVE VALLEY — School safety tops tonight's agenda for the Mohave Valley Elementary School District governing board.

The board will consider approving a memorandum of understanding between the Mohave County Sheriff's Office to integrate the district's security systems with Mutualink.

During the previous school year, the board approved a partnership to install new cameras, sensors and other security upgrades on district

campuses — funded by a \$490,213 grant.

The Mutualink partnership, if the MOA is approved, will integrate first-responder access to the new security assets and install a panic button to directly contact first responders in an emergency.

The service would be provided at no cost to the school district for the first year, and no more than \$2,500 annually afterward.

A presentation about the company and the system's benefits was held Thursday at a Bullhead City School District, which representatives of the



MVESD attended.

Likewise, the board will receive an overall update on all security upgrades in place for the 2022-23 school year.

Also during the meeting, a presentation about Project

EASEL (Empowering Arizona with Social Emotional Learning) will be conducted.

Project EASEL is a multi-year program is designed to provide development and coaching to educators to improve student social and emotional learning.

Fort Mojave Elementary, Camp Mohave Elementary and Mohave Valley Junior High were selected as three of the 15 schools in the state to participate this year.

Mohave High School previously participated in the 2019-21 cohort of the program.

It is offered by Arizona

Department of Education/Exceptional Student Services in conjunction with the University of Kansas Research Collaboration.

The board also is expected to approve a \$7 T-shirt fee for new district shirts, which is included on the consent agenda.

The district rebranded school logos last year, thus necessitating new shirts.

The governing board meeting will be held at 6 p.m. tonight in the Professional Development Room at Mohave Valley Elementary School, 1419 Willow Drive.

MVESD excited about project results

By FRED MAYSON
THE DAILY NEWS

MOHAVE VALLEY — The governing board meeting room at Mohave Valley Elementary School was filled with posters outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the Mohave Valley Elementary School District, while the school board heard its fill of improvements made over the summer during Tuesday night's board meeting.

The biggest changes made involved an array of security upgrades, including facial recognition cameras, vape sensors and reinforcing doors (including electrification to lock doors remotely).

The board supplemented these upgrades by approving a memorandum of understanding with the Mohave County Sheriff's Office to enhance security with a "panic-button" system through Raptor Technologies from Mutualink Inc.



Through the system, approved personnel can send internal alerts about incidents, automatically trigger a law enforcement response and give law enforcement access to the school's cameras during an emergency.

"They won't go in blind. They see everything that's happening before they ever get there," said board member Rose Vera. "Do you know how much time people waste when they have to sit there and secure the scene? This can save lives."

The district also will undergo significant training and drills related to safety to ensure

Summer program proves successful

By FRED MAYSON
THE DAILY NEWS

MOHAVE VALLEY — Two presentations given to the Mohave Valley Elementary School District governing board Tuesday night highlighted students scholarly progress in the district.

The first concerned the district's Summer Enrichment Academy.

"There's growth across the board between all grades. We were really happy about that," said Devan Ehrheart, summer enrichment coordinator.

The rising first graders, for example, saw a 22% improvement on math testing from the beginning of the program to its end and learned 28 new words — last year's cohort only learned six words.

The program was expanded last summer thanks to a grant offered through the governor's office.

With the funding, the district was able to hire more teachers and run the program for three additional days.

The first half of the day focused on academic instruction while the latter half of the day focused on activities like dancing, coding, crafts and gardening.

"We were in competition with the Boys & Girls Club (because they) were free for the summer with the same grant," Ehrheart said. "But we held strong with our numbers — almost 200 kids."

Regardless of where MVESD students went during the hot summer months, beginning-of-the-year testing revealed more about the overall



state of the student population.

After Ehrheart's presentation, Superintendent Cole Young updated the board on student testing scores compared to state averages.

The data compared each grade level's beginning of the year testing data to testing conducted at the end of the previous school year.

In addition to comparing the overall averages, the presentation detailed how many students were moderately proficient, partially proficient, proficient and highly proficient in their testing.

Some grade levels saw impressive improvement.

For example, this year's fifth-graders ended last year 15 points under the state average in math, while beginning the current school year 17 points above average.

Young said there are positives even for the grades that ended last year above the state average but have since slipped below.

The fourth-graders' English Language Arts scores were five points above average last year, but negative five this year — however, fewer fourth-graders are in the bottom

"moderately proficient" category.

"There's a small win," Young said. "The story is, think about the 20% kids who are now no longer middling proficient."

However, some grade levels saw a notable drop, which couldn't be explained away.

The current sixth grade cohort dropped from minus two to minus 10 in math, and all but one of the fifth grade cohort's 15 "highly proficient" ELA students dropped into a lower category.

"This is the start of the conversation, this is where we start asking 'why?'" Young said.

The district conducted a deep dive into the testing data and will move forward with intervention strategies for students who need help, Cole said.

In other action, the board:

- Approved stipends for staff serving extra duties at Fort Mojave Elementary School and Mohave Valley Junior High School.

- Approved a nurse job description, in the interest of possible future grants. It was stated at the meeting that the new position will not replace any existing staff in the district.

- Conducted a first reading of policy advisories, written in response to laws and decisions made by the 55th Legislature, and a policy change clarifying the dates of monthly board meeting.

- Set a special meeting to walk through the Mohave Valley Elementary School campus at 4 p.m. on Oct. 25, the same day as the next regular board meeting.

Kindergartners enthusiastic about outer space

By FRED MAYSON
THE DAILY NEWS

FORT MOHAVE — Kindergartners at Fort Mojave Elementary School had a big question to answer: what does outer space represent to them?

To Ignatius Prazett, that meant being an astronaut. With a little help from his family, he was able to come to school in an impressive space suit.

Samantha Mueller thought of rocketships and made a model to show off to her class.

Others thought of constellations, stars and planets, and eagerly crafted their own art projects to cap off their space unit.

Students are told to make a culminating project to represent what they've learned at the end of a learning unit.

"It's all about teaching them critical thinking skills," said FMES kindergar-

ten teacher Tiffany Higgins, "We give them the materials and the whatever they need, then let them learn to problem solve."

The project is part of the school's drive toward projected learning and STEM assignments — lessons that combine art with science, technology, engineering and math.

For example, some students practiced their math by counting the planets while creating representations of the solar system.

But developing critical thinking and problem solving skills from an early age is the true goal. Those traits are highly valued in higher education and many career fields.

Higgins said the projects also are a great way to get parents involved with their children's education.

"We focus on college readiness starting from preschool," she said.



Contributed
Ignatius Grazett shows off his astronaut gear.