Earlier this month I gave a presentation to the Santa Clara Rotary Club. I have always found Rotary Club audiences to be avid listeners who are very interested in topics and trends in public education.

My topic was based on a document called “The State of Education,” a report compiled by staff here at the Santa Clara County Office of Education. My talk, accompanied by a slideshow with an abundance of facts and figures, essentially had two themes, which I have touched on often in the past:

1. Schools in Santa Clara County are performing better than many people think.
2. We still have a long way to go in lifting the performance of all students and all subgroups.

We are lucky that many of our schools and students are the cream of the crop in California. One need only compare county students’ Advance Placement scores to what others achieve.

SCCOE students build bikes for charity

About three dozen needy children in Santa Clara County got bicycles this holiday season thanks in part to the efforts of a group of SCCOE community school students and their teachers.

About 10 students from Alternative Placement Academy and Novo Community School assembled about 30 bicycles as part of TurningWheels for Kids’ annual bike build last month, said Charles Carlisle, a Novo science teacher.

Launched by Carlisle’s sister in 2005, the nonprofit TurningWheels works to acquire, build and distribute bicycles to impoverished children in the region during the holiday season. Now a program under the Valley Medical Foundation, TurningWheels has distributed more than 6,000 bicycles since its inception.

The SCCOE students were among about 700 volunteers who filled the South Hall of the San Jose McEnery Convention Center on Dec. 11 to assemble more than 2,400 bicycles.

As a reward, the organization offered the students six bicycles for their own use, but the pupils opted instead to donate them to charity, Carlisle said.

Carlisle said the students enjoyed the process, and he hopes to make the event an annual holiday tradition for his pupils.

Student finds passion, talent in ROP class

Once shy, quiet and introverted, Danny Jensen finally found the tools to express himself in a Santa Clara County Regional Occupational Program digital photography class.
Passing Rates to their counterparts in the state and nation to realize that.

At the same time, too many of our students are not gaining the necessary skills in our schools to succeed in life. And too many students are dropping out of school, which makes their prospects for success in life drastically more difficult.

I gave my friends at the Santa Clara Rotary a lot to digest in my half-hour presentation. (To see the slideshow, visit this page of our website and click on “State of the Schools 2011.”) Based on their interest and questions, my belief was again reinforced that people in our community care deeply about our schools, and want our students to have the best education possible.

Danny's achievements earned him special recognition this month from the Santa Clara County Board of Education.

“Life is better with art in it,” Danny told the Board, when showing a poster he designed.

Danny's work at Sobrato earned him a combined $33,000 scholarship to the Art Institute of Sunnyvale. Danny hopes to one day earn a master's degree in photography, and open his own studio.

Check out a story about Danny in the Morgan Hill Times.

ELL program receives national review

Bilingual educators from across the country next month will discuss next month how to nationally expand an effective professional development system already in place throughout Santa Clara County.

Expanding “A Look at Learning,” which helps school districts develop expert educators who are highly committed to increasing academic achievement of English learners, will be the topic of the Feb. 16 pre-conference institute for the National Association for Bilingual Education's annual conference.

The institute will share district implementation models. Participants will also discuss and plan how the ALL system could be implemented or integrated into existing state or district efforts to support English learner achievement.

ALL is a research-based instructional practice that supports strong primary language development to build a foundation for student learning and second language acquisition.

Dr. Yee Wan, Multilingual Programs coordinator for the SCCOE, and Dr. Bill Conrad, director of Assessment and Accountability for the SCCOE, are among the presenters at the New Orleans institute.

Board recognizes employee, student

Here's a summary of the Santa Clara County Board of Education's actions at its Jan. 12 meeting:

- Recognized Roger Kimbrough as the January Employee of the Month
Silicon Valley Reads

Learn more about what everyone will be reading this year.

The Board of Education is the elected governing body of the Office of Education. Its seven members serve four-year terms and are elected by different regions of the county. Learn more about the members, and view their meeting schedule, agendas and minutes.

**Tennis tourney teaches sportsmanship**

Local students will have a chance at an upcoming professional tennis tournament to learn about the benefits of fitness and good sportsmanship, and maybe pick up a few pointers on their serves.

The 2011 SAP Open’s Kids Day runs from 9 a.m. to noon Feb. 11 at the HP Pavilion in San Jose. The event is open to second- through eighth-grade students, teachers and chaperones. See registration information.

Now in its 16th year, the free event includes a demonstration by professional tennis players, and the 12 winners of a student essay contest will venture onto the court to meet professional players and participate in drills.

For more information about the event, contact Tricia Sullivan at (408) 999-5743.

The tournament runs Feb. 7 to 13, and will feature players like 2010 SAP Open champion Fernando Verdasco and 2009 U.S. Open champion Juan Martin Del Potro.

**Film explores ‘achievement culture’**

Several venues in Santa Clara County are showing the documentary “Race to Nowhere,” which profiles students and schools amid a high-pressure culture of heavy homework and testing.

“With no advertising and little news media attention, ‘Race to Nowhere’ has become a must-see movie in communities where the kindergarten-to-Harvard steeplechase is most competitive,” said a story in the New York Times.

Several Bay Area people are featured in the film.

More information, including where to find local showings, can be found on the documentary website.
Since 1852, the Santa Clara County Office of Education has provided vital services and resources to the county's 31 K-12 public school districts and more than 250,000 students. The COE strives to provide: advocacy and leadership on education issues, student programs that are models of excellence, and indispensable services to schools and community partners. The COE takes pride in being a premier employer and a champion for children, schools, and community.

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