It didn’t take long in my new role as the county superintendent of schools in Santa Clara County to understand how serious our region is about the elimination of the academic achievement gap -- both of the gaps.

Most people are very familiar with the racial achievement gap that primarily plagues students of color who are usually also socio-economically disadvantaged; in many cases English learners; and, to a lesser degree, identified and over-identified as students with special needs. Many students are in all three categories. This gap has been described by many as the civil rights issue of our time, under the banner of social justice.

COE, Texas Instruments announce STEM Teaching Award winners

Six teachers from throughout Santa Clara County have been named recipients of the inaugural Texas Instruments STEM Teaching Awards for their outstanding instruction in the subjects of science, technology, engineering and math.

The honorees will be recognized for their teaching excellence at the Santa Clara County Teacher Recognition Celebration next month. Thanks to the generosity of Texas Instruments (TI), the STEM honorees will receive cash awards of $1,000 each.

A panel of judges selected the honorees from a wide field of candidates. Teacher applicants and their principals both submitted extensive applications. Here's a list of the winners:

- **Channy Cornejo**, East Side Union High School District, Santa Teresa High School, Advanced Placement statistics/math analysis;
- **Debra Dimas**, East Side Union High School District, Santa Teresa High School, Advanced Placement physics;
- **Bill Dunbar**, Palo Alto Unified School District, Gunn High School, physics/engineering/robotics;
- **Bernadette Salgarino**, East Side Union High School District, James Lick High School, mathematics;
- **Mike Sbarbaro**, Luther Burbank School District, Luther Burbank School, eighth grade; and
- **Tara Sikorski**, San Jose Unified School District, San Jose High School, International Baccalaureate biology/Project Lead the Way biotech

Learn more about the STEM honorees [here](#).

The TI STEM Teaching Awards were added to this year’s Teacher Recognition Celebration to acknowledge the growing
It has prompted a reexamining of our public school system around adequate and equal funding, teacher effectiveness and tenure, school choice and charter schools, universal prekindergarten and early learning opportunities, blending learning environments and other school design models, and many other school reform initiatives.

These are all incredibly important topics to the Santa Clara County Office of Education and to the 31 school districts throughout the county, and there is mounting evidence that progress is being made. Over the next several months, I hope to share some thoughts on many of the issues that are important to us all. But today, I want to touch on another critical area of concern that we are tackling -- a second, perhaps less obvious achievement gap. This gap exists between our highest performing students and the highest performing students from countries around the world, primarily in Asian and European countries. And, of particular interest is these international students' dominance in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or what we know as STEM education.

This gap has caught the attention of the Silicon Valley, elevating an interest and a real sense of urgency around the performance and success of our public schools systems. I know this to be true because in the relatively short time that I have been in my position, I have attended many functions with STEM as a central theme of importance. In two cases, I have been honored to moderate and engage in panel discussions around the topic of STEM with leaders from the business and corporate sector; leaders from the high technology sector; leaders from the education community; and leaders in the nonprofit, philanthropy and advocacy world.

All share a strong interest in seeing more students take an interest in STEM-oriented career pathways; all share an interest in seeing increased enrollment in advanced placement STEM courses; all share an interest in seeing more students of color excited about a career in a STEM field; and, most importantly, all of them are ready to contribute and help our schools improve our current reality, because both enrollment and performance in emphasis placed on preparing students for the global, high-tech workforce.

The awards honor STEM teachers in grades seven through 12 who consistently demonstrate quality instruction, inspire interest and enhance student achievement in STEM subjects.

Appointee sought to fill County Board vacancy

The Santa Clara County Board of Education plans to make a provisional appointment to fill a vacancy from Board Trustee Area 6, which became vacant with the resignation of Craig Mann this month.

Mann, a six-year member of the Santa Clara County Board of Education, resigned from his seat to take a teaching position in a county school district.

To apply for the position, applicants must be registered voters residing within Board Trustee Area 6, which includes the Alum Rock Union, Mount Pleasant, Franklin-McKinley School Districts, and the corresponding portion of East Side Union High School District, as well as a small portion of San Jose Unified.

The provisional appointee will serve until the term of office of the vacant seat expires in November 2014.

Learn more about the application process, including deadlines for submission and how to confirm eligibility, here.

Mann was elected to the board in 2006; served as board president in 2009; and was reelected by a sizable margin in 2010. Mann was characterized by Dr. De La Torre, Ed.D. as a “bold and visionary” trustee.

Students receive free backpacks, supplies

Thousands of low-income students in Santa Clara County will have new backpacks and supplies in the new school year, thanks to two recent giveaways.

Earlier this month, Dr. De La Torre helped distribute knapsacks as part of San Jose-based nonprofit Sacred Heart Community Service’s Pack-A-Back drive. The annual event distributes more than 2,300 backpacks filled with grade-appropriate supplies to low-income students throughout the region.

Dr. De La Torre also helped distribute backpacks at an event last month. “STEM in the School Yard” was held at Downtown College Prep charter school, and was sponsored by Texas Instruments (TI) and Family Giving Tree. About 130 low-income, incoming freshmen received backpacks filled with supplies, including a scientific calculator from TI.
STEM education are too low to support a future and relevant labor market.

Baffling! How is it that the world’s epicenter of technology and innovation with an unrivaled high technology sector; prestigious colleges and universities; and an abundance of resources in the form of capital, influence, philanthropy and intellect, be underserved by a domestic public school system that, at present, is not preparing and producing the highly-skilled workforce needed to fill positions that will ensure that we thrive economically tomorrow?

I am convinced that real concerns around our economic prosperity and the quality of life that many Americans have grown to expect are the force behind the relatively recent national campaign to promote STEM in every school and every classroom.

In times that are challenging for our public school system but exciting as well, Silicon Valley is well positioned to lead a modern day renaissance; a reawakening of the sciences, technology engineering, and mathematics or STEM. It is one of the reasons that I was drawn to this position, and after two months, I know I made the right decision. Some extraordinary accomplishments in public education are on the horizon, and what better place to be than in the middle of maelstrom?

The students had recently completed a three-week program that offered hands-on STEM activities. For example, participants in the Summer Bridge program built roller coasters to study energy conservation and used chromatography to design bandanas.

**COE school joins ‘Whole Child Network’**

A school in the Santa Clara County Office of Education's Alternative Education Department will receive resources and professional development to further a “whole child” approach to education.

Odyssey Community School has been selected as one of 10 schools nationwide to participate in the ASCD “Whole Child Network” of schools.

As part of its selection, Odyssey will receive a $10,000 grant for this school year. The school will also participate in a school improvement process using the tenets of ASCD’s “Whole Child” initiative.

Leaders from Odyssey kicked off their participation last month with a 2½-day Whole Child Network Summer Institute at ASCD's Alexandria, Va., headquarters. Administrators and teachers formulated strategies and learned tactics for implementing the whole-child approach to education in their schools.

Odyssey also will be the site of a one-day professional development training session, designed to introduce the whole-child approach to the school's community.

[ASCD](http://www.ascd.org) is an educational leadership organization dedicated to advancing best practices and policies for the success of each learner.

**Board approves charter revisions**

Here’s a summary of actions taken by the Santa Clara County Board of Education at its Aug. 8 meeting and special Aug. 14 meeting:

- Approved a request from Magnolia Science Academy charter school to increase class size from 25 to 28 students, and extend the opening of two schools to 2013-14
- Appointed COE Purchasing Manager Andy Bursch to the Los Gatos Redevelopment Successor Agency Oversight Board
- Continued to its Sept. 5 meeting a request from Rocketship Charter Schools to exempt a parcel of land from zoning regulations

The Board of Education is the elected governing body of the COE. 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.
'Camp' teaches library personnel new skills

More than 140 library media staffers and teacher librarians gathered at the COE this month to learn about the latest available resources and techniques.

Now in its 10th year, the annual Library Summer Camp is co-hosted by the COE's Learning Multimedia Center and the San Mateo County Office of Education, and offers the latest in professional development for K-12 library personnel.

Children's book experts Walter "the Giant" Mayes and Valerie Lewis offered the keynote address by sharing the latest tomes that are bound to become future favorites.

The rest of the day was filled with workshops and panels that covered a variety of topics including digital storytelling, library advocacy techniques and fun ways to introduce the Dewey Decimal system to students.

Handout materials from the event are available here.

Math teachers deepen skills, knowledge

Nearly 40 middle school mathematics teachers from throughout the region learned more about their subject, as well as new teaching strategies, at a recent summertime conference.

Attendees of the nine-day Faculty Academy for Mathematics Excellence (FAME) Summer Institute increased their algebra and pre-algebra content knowledge; learned new ways to teach math and integrate technology; and improved their ability to design and implement lessons that help improve student understanding.

A partnership between the COE and the Krause Center for Innovation (KCI) at Foothill College, FAME offers professional development to middle school math teachers. Now in its third year, the program has served 99 teachers in 18 school districts throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

The program is designed to increase student achievement in pre-algebra and algebra courses; reduce the achievement gap between
well- and underserved students; and promote the use of technology to enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics.

The Summer Institute was facilitated by COE staff members Cecilio Dimas, Jivan Dhaliwal and Greg Pitzer, with support from Curriculum & Instruction Director Melissa Christie.

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.