

Palmdale SD thrives through collaborative and proactive leadership

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The sense of pride that Superintendent Raul Maldonado has for Palmdale School District is palpable. If you ask him, the large TK-8 district has the best students, the best teachers, principals, custodians, secretaries, bus drivers and everyone in between.

What sets Palmdale apart? “Instead of waiting for things to happen we make things happen,” Maldonado said. That is why, when schools first closed at the beginning of the pandemic, Palmdale officials were quick to ensure every student had a device and a hotspot to connect to.

“We had a tremendous amount of student participation, as well as parents who were able to log on with student devices — it was fantastic,” Maldonado said. “Now we’re approaching the new school year and are very enthusiastic about the fact that we’re going to be able to open up our schools. There’s a lot of joy and happiness around welcoming students back, and I’ve been traveling around the district to make sure that principals have everything they need to open up with all the safety measures in place.”

Indeed, by 11 a.m. on July 27, Maldonado had already visited six different school sites, eager to once again work with stakeholders face-to-face. The successes of the past year and a half were the direct result of collaboration among board members, principals and their teams, families, custodians, PTA parents, “all pulling together to ensure we had a successful reopening in hybrid and now in person,” he said.

While many struggled to engage children and their families early on, perhaps the most frustrating thing during the pandemic was that proactive Palmdale officials could come up with a million great plans and within hours new developments would render them obsolete, Maldonado said.

“Not knowing what the guidelines were was difficult for us, but we adapted and changed how we did business and



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Raul Maldonado, Superintendent of Schools

moved things forward knowing that getting to the heart of student instruction was the most important thing,” he explained. “We just adapted, we’re flexible.”

Now the focus is re-engaging students in the classroom and offering a well-rounded curriculum. The district has hired a physical education teacher for each elementary school, which will also have a “maker room” in which students are given the tools they need to explore their interests with hands on projects. They can create pieces of art, build robotics projects and more.

Middle schoolers, meanwhile, will once again have full in-person access to interactive nursing and STEM/STEAM courses, as well as the Youth Cinema Project, which provides students an opportunity to make their own movies and showcase them in Hollywood at the end of the year.

While this was certainly the first time in his 32-year career in education that Maldonado had to lead through a pandemic of this scope, it was the relationships built in Palmdale SD and the collective understanding that everyone was there to work for kids that kept him confident things would be okay.

“One of the things that helped me through this pandemic was knowing that we have a strong team here in Palmdale that I can count on to make sure processes are in place, whether it’s in facilities getting our schools ready, or in the areas of student services, special education, finances, education services — everybody was working together,” Maldonado said. “That’s one of the qualities that I like to brag about, the fact that we are a team. We’re a big school district but we feel like a family because everybody knows each other and can feel confident that we’re all about making sure the students have the best instructional program, that they’re achieving at high levels, and that we have equity in mind and value the students’ cultures and languages, and ultimately, that we value our community.”