



SAN MATEO
COUNTY
OFFICE OF
EDUCATION

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 6, 2017
No. 3

Friday CAFE Kicks Off in San Mateo County

Family engagement professionals gather for coffee, camaraderie and conversation

REDWOOD CITY, CALIF. – On Friday, January 27, the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) and the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center (PCRC) launched a network known as Friday CAFE—an acronym that stands for Community and Family Engagement. Nearly 80 family engagement professionals from more than 35 local organizations attended the kick-off event at CuriOdyssey in San Mateo. This new initiative is jointly funded by family engagement grants from First 5 San Mateo County and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Friday CAFE is an unconventional network for people who work at the intersection of families and learning that began in Connecticut two and a half years ago. The network was created in response to feedback from family engagement practitioners, who said they often felt isolated and wanted a way to network with their colleagues. Friday CAFEs aim to inspire and restore the participants through peer interactions and thought-provoking discussions led by local speakers, known as "conversation catalysts," in creative venues, and it has been a resounding success. Participants in Connecticut have stated that the connections they've built through Friday CAFE are invaluable, reenergizing them when they need it most and reminding them why they love their jobs. In bringing this program to San Mateo County on a monthly basis, we hope to provide similar experiences for the family engagement professionals in our county.

"The Friday CAFE is a powerful strategy to support a shift away from 'random acts of parent involvement' and focus on a more integrated and systemic approach to family engagement," said Soodie Ansari, the coordinator of early learning dual language support services at SMCOE. "This initiative aims to create a space where family engagement professionals can feel inspired and rejuvenated so they can continue to do their deep work with families."

"Families are the key to strong schools and neighborhoods, and they are too often an untapped resource," said Michelle Vilchez, executive director of PCRC. "We hope that, through this work, we can hone and harvest the full potential of that community."

One of many highlights of the afternoon was a keynote address by Dr. Francisco Reveles, Yuba County superintendent of schools, whose presentation reinforced the idea of using success, not survival, to help orient the work that practitioners do with children and families. Attendees were also excited to hear from Vaea Sanft, a parent and father engagement leader with the Institute for Human and Social Development (IHSD), who spoke about his experiences as a father and a practitioner in the family engagement field. He hoped to welcome more fathers into the work and into the lives of their children.

"It was heartening to be in a room of professionals committed to supporting families," said Louise Piper, coordinator of the College of San Mateo's Child Development Center, who attended the event. "I look forward to engaging in rich, thoughtful discussions, gaining additional knowledge, sharing resources and building a strong sense of community with my colleagues."

"We're excited to finally have a network that will respond to the needs of family engagement professionals and provide a forum for self-care and reflection," said Michelle Blakely, the planning and program director for First 5 San Mateo County. "This is a necessary step toward ensuring we're delivering the best possible services to families."

For more information about the program and for dates of upcoming Friday CAFEs, visit their website: <http://fridaycafe.org/chapters/san-mateo/>.

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The San Mateo County Office of Education is committed to ensuring excellence and equity in education by inspiring students, investing in teachers, invigorating leaders, and involving communities.