



California
Center for
School Climate



AUDIO GALLERY

**Pajaro Valley Unified
School District**

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, CA

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A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO STUDENT AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

A whole-child, whole-school, whole-community approach to supporting healthy development considers the connection between school, home, and community settings in providing aligned student and family supports.¹ Schools and districts that incorporate the needs of families and caregivers in their approach to student development promote multigenerational wellness.

Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, Superintendent of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD), characterizes PVUSD schools as the center of the community. The district has a significant population of students with lower incomes, experiencing homelessness, from migrant families, and from non-native English households. Families often reach out to school staff for wrap-around services. Dr. Rodriguez utilizes an asset-based outlook in celebrating the cultural and linguistic diversity of her community by advocating for equitable access to vital academic, health, legal, and other resources.²

To inform the programming and supports provided by PVUSD, Dr. Rodriguez has prioritized avenues for family input through informal opportunities at community events, as well as through annual surveys using tools like the Youth Truth Survey, which yielded over 18,000 responses from family, students, and staff in the 2021–2022 school year. As part of PVUSD's efforts to respond to community concerns, the district has developed a wellness ecosystem of partner organizations to ensure effective coordination and awareness of services available to community members.

Families throughout PVUSD can come to the newly opened Family Engagement and Wellness Center to receive these supports. Students

come to the Center for a range of social-emotional supports, including individual counseling and youth groups provided by the Pajaro Valley Prevention & Student Assistance program, and free tutoring from Luna y Sol. Families can come to the Center to receive confidential mental health counseling provided by a district clinician, housing assistance from the community Action Board, free groceries from the Second Harvest food co-op, and more.

All these efforts have demonstrated PVUSD’s commitment to serving the Pajaro Valley community, resulting in a high level of relational trust between families and staff, which is an essential component of effective school communities.³ Christina MacLean, the Coordinator of the Family Engagement and Wellness Center, noted that parents often come to staff members like her “for the knowledge and the help; the first place they think of to go ... is the schools.” Data collected by the Center also show high numbers of student self-referrals, which signifies the positive school culture PVUSD has cultivated through its responsive whole-community approach.

School Information	
Number of students	17,148
Geographic setting	Rural
Grades served	PK–12
School model	Various

Student Demographics	
Latinx	83.5%
White	13.5%
Multiracial	0.9%
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.8%
Filipino	0.6%
Black	0.4%
Native American/Alaska Native	0.2%
Students with disabilities	15.1%
English language learners	36.3%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	77.2%

Data sourced from www.ed-data.org.



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Consider while you listen . . .

To create a wellness ecosystem, PVUSD team members prioritize being present and accessible in their community, where they collect feedback from family members at community events. **How does your team make itself available to the community? What tools does your school or district use to collect feedback from family members and other partners?**

The PVUSD team emphasizes the bi-directionality of their strategic communications strategies, which allow families to share their needs and offer feedback, as well as receive critical information from the district.

How are your strategic communications strategies bi-directional?

References

- ¹ Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educating-whole-child-report>
- ² Goodman, A., Farrell, K., & The Goodman Center. (2022). *Why asset-framing is better storytelling*. Retrieved from SEL Center. <https://selcenter.wested.org/resource/why-asset-framing-is-better-storytelling/>
- ³ Bryk, A. S., and Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 40–45. http://www.miteacher.org/uploads/1/0/3/4/10347810/trust_in_schools.pdf