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Bill Cirone op ed column

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Partnerships have made the difference

By Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools

Partnerships are the central thread that runs through the fabric of all we have done here at the Santa Barbara County Education Office for the past three and a half decades. I would be remiss to leave office before publicly thanking and acknowledging our partners, large and small, who have made a difference in the lives of local families and children, and the schools that serve them. The willingness to step up and help has been inspirational at every level.

Members of our community — businesses, philanthropic organizations, institutions of higher learning, and private citizens — have all recognized the critical value of education as the cornerstone of democracy and the foundation for America’s future.

I am so grateful for their participation and efforts on behalf of our schools and our children. I am also very proud of the sheer breadth and depth of the partnerships we have helped nurture through the years. Some of these partnerships have supported the arts, as with the annual *I Madonnari* Italian Street Painting Festival, the Children’s Creative Project, and the awarding of a Performing Arts Teacher of the Year. Others have helped recognize and support outstanding teachers, through Teachers Network Grants, Crystal Apple Awards, the Teacher of the Year award, the Distinguished New Educator award, and many other programs. Technology access has also been the priority of the nationally acclaimed Computers for Families program, initiated in partnership with the highly regarded Partners in Education group. Other examples include the Volunteer Project, the Intern Project, Principal for a Day, and the Celebration of Partnerships. Environmental education has been supported through partnerships like West of West and others.

These are just a sample of the truly innumerable partnerships that make a difference countywide; listing all of them would require pages upon pages. It is so impressive that our community embraces and recognizes the concept that “we are better together,” working in partnership, and I truly believe that

partnerships in this county are second to none. What a credit to the caring, the heart, and the level of responsibility reflected in all those who have taken part.

It has been said that individual snowflakes are fragile, but when they band together they can stop traffic. That's what we've witnessed countywide — people and organizations banding together as a unified force to support students and schools. It has made all the difference. No individual organization could have done it alone.

I have often quoted Katherine Graham, whose famous statement captures so well what I believe all our partners feel when they help local children: “To love what you do, and feel that it matters, how could anything be more fun?”

On behalf of the schools and children of Santa Barbara County, I want to say again how grateful we all are for the support, the caring, and the impact partnerships have had, and the difference they have made for our next generation of leaders and workers. Thank you all.

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