

Student agency takes center stage at Alvord USD

April 2023

"Though Dr. Allan Mucerino serves as Superintendent for Alvord Unified School District, the lessons from his past experiences – not only in district administration, but as a student, teacher, assistant principal and principal – are foundational in his leadership style.

Throughout his time in education, Dr. Mucerino has identified ways in which educational institutions push students aside or leave them behind. He prioritizes closing the opportunity gap faced by these students – the students who may be discouraged by disciplinary trips to his office, the students who may feel funneled away from higher education because of their family's background, as he himself faced as a kid.

"I have a heart for the children who don't have voices, who really have not been embraced by education as an institution, because you're rewarded when you do well in school – and if you don't do well in school, you're suddenly rejected," Dr. Mucerino said. "I've managed to get to this place now in my career where I'm able to shape those policies and those practices so that all children could have a safe space."

For Dr. Mucerino, creating this safe environment is essential in getting students excited to attend school, a task that has only become more difficult in the wake of COVID-19, which drove up chronic absenteeism in spades. The pandemic presented Alvord USD with new battles in keeping students' attention and closing learning gaps, especially for its youngest students, who never had the chance to adjust to an in-person learning environment.

However, Dr. Mucerino has found within these challenges new learning opportunities that will allow Alvord USD to better support the needs of students. It "opened eyes, being in children's living rooms," to the unique support required



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**Dr. Allan J. Mucerino,
Superintendent**

to meet students' full social emotional needs, as well as fostered even stronger lines of communication with parents, who could turn to Dr. Mucerino's weekly newsletters for updates during a time of extensive confusion.

Alvord USD is now driving student attendance up by centering social-emotional learning strategies, providing additional mental health support, and expanding extracurricular and course pathways that will grant students the critical socialization that they have sorely missed. Instead of leaving kids to the limitations of a one-size-fits-all model, Mucerino wants to build a system that values the uniqueness of all students.

"I think we've really come a long way in meeting kids where they were," Mucerino said. "Student agency has never been in a better place, and I think it's only going to continue to improve."

For Dr. Mucerino, a critical tool in tackling these issues has been the district's public-private partnerships, which allow the Alvord USD to rely on specialized assistance for key issues, freeing up staff to dedicate their time and resources elsewhere. When it comes to the post-COVID attendance crisis, Alvord USD can count on its partnership with School Innovations & Achievement to lighten the load.

"We have a new motto 'every student by name,' as testament of what we believe is important, and nothing measures school success more than attendance," Mucerino said. "SI&A has certainly been a great partner to help us meet our goals."