

New sights on first day of school



The renovated Willie L. Brown Jr. Middle School in the Bayview now boasts a new science lab, music room and digital media lab. (Michael Ares/Special to the S.F. Examiner)
By Richard Carranza on August 18, 2015 1:00 am

Yesterday was a great day.

We opened our schools to students after summer break. I saw friends hugging in the schoolyard, parents of kindergartners tearing up as they said goodbye and teachers warmly greeting their new pupils.

Yes, you can see these scenes every new school year. But this year there are also a few new things I saw as I toured schools on the first day.

A brand new school

And what a school it is. In the beautiful Bayview location where the old worn out Willie Brown Jr. Middle School building sat, we now have a state-of-the-art science laboratory, music room and digital media lab. The school has a “maker space” equipped with tools, materials and equipment that students will use to develop and design prototypes.

But Willie Brown goes a big step beyond just STEM classes: The school has a full array of socio-emotional, mental and physical health supports, including an on-campus health clinic, a dental facility — and opportunities for students to develop their personal health skills while working alongside health practitioners.

Countless community and business partners, and most significantly San Francisco residents, enabled us to get WBMS built, providing more-than-generous funding and expertise. We promise you your investment will be well worth it to the hundreds of children who began learning there yesterday and the thousands more to come.

Students come back to teach

Heard about the national teacher shortage? We knew it was coming so we’ve done a lot already to get great teachers into classrooms. In fact, some of them attended our schools and are back after college as SF Teachers in Residence.

Like doctors, teachers in residence learn in the classroom of a highly accomplished demonstration teacher for an entire year while taking coursework from university partners. Upon completion of their residency, new teachers are supported for their first two years of teaching. Yesterday, I met Tina Yang, a graduate of the San Francisco Unified School District who attended Lincoln High’s Teacher Academy for high school students. She is now a teacher in residence with El Dorado Elementary second grade teacher Nikki Thornton-Street. Welcome back, Tina. We are thrilled to have you.

Computer science is alive

Let’s face it, the language of computers is a staple in our lives. So, last spring the SFUSD made a landmark decision: Everybody in our schools will learn computer science, starting with basic concepts in preschool.

While offering computer science in every grade is still a few years away, several schools are offering new classes this year, including Washington High, which up until this year only offered advance placement computer science classes. Yesterday I visited the school’s new Exploring Computer Science class. Luckily it was the first day so I could sort of understand what was going on. I hope to learn more.

Just the beginning

I look forward to sharing more about what’s happening in our public schools throughout the year. Stay tuned to this column for more adventures in learning.