

# Shaping students' futures through continuous progress and compassion in Folsom Cordova schools

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**B**estselling author and Minister Eric Butterworth once penned the phrase "Don't go through life, grow through life," which could speak to anything from learning from one's mistakes to making concerted efforts to go out of one's comfort zone now and again.

To leaders such as Dr. Sarah Koligian, superintendent of Folsom Cordova Unified School District, growing through life means constantly adapting to ever changing circumstances.

In a school setting, for instance, she says it is vital to have a 'growth mindset' in order to care for the whole child and help students succeed.

"A school district is a reflection of the community and of society—we're a microcosm of what's going on in the larger environment," Dr. Koligian explains. "We need to continue to challenge ourselves as adults in the system to expand our foundation of what we need to offer our students. As our students are impacted by society at large, there are challenges they may face that need our support and attention.

"We can't be static," she says. "We have to embrace this growth mindset as a team, as a system in order to start affecting change for all students."

It begins with determining everyone's strengths and building a team where people can be empowered to take the lead, and feel confident using those skills. Dr. Koligian says that is what she strives to do with the district's leadership team, classroom teachers, and support staff, but notes that she is constantly learning new things right alongside her employees.

Equally as important is building bridges with students and their families—especially the ones that may be the most difficult to reach.

"There's nothing more important than building relationships with the people around you," Dr. Koligian says. "It



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Dr. Sarah Koligian, Superintendent

doesn't just have to be the people you work with and who you see on a daily basis. It can be those in the community or our families, including those who may not be comfortable coming to a school site."

So how does one continue to build relationships outside of the school setting?

"That's a work in progress because every community is different," says Koligian, who began her career supporting English learners and their families whose primary languages were Spanish, Hmong, and Punjabi. "Something I've learned is that in order to continue to impact a system and make sure it meets the needs of our ever changing population, you have to better

understand the heart of all those who make the system what it is."

In an effort to reach out to families and promote positive student attendance, Folsom Cordova USD is implementing The Achievement Initiative featuring Attention2Attendance (A2A)—a system developed by School Innovations & Achievement (SI&A) to track student attendance and send letters to families in their home language when their child is trending toward becoming chronically absent.

"Achieving equity is about student empowerment: making sure all students have what they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond," says Susan Cook, COO and Leadership Coach at SI&A. "For districts to ensure that every child has an equitable opportunity for success, it requires exactly what Dr. Koligian is promoting: building relationships with families and community to better meet the needs of the whole child."

The coming school year will continue to focus on building a healthy climate and culture, and support a positive experience for the district's students and staff, with a special emphasis on improving the social-emotional well-being of both FCUSD children and staff, Dr. Koligian says.