

EDUCATION

Education Secretary visits Delco to boost in-person learning

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UPPER DARBY » The new U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona, made a stop at Beverly Hills Middle School Tuesday to promote the Biden administration's efforts to open schools for more in-person learning and in support of the American Rescue Plan.

Dubbed the "Help is Here" tour, Cardona spoke with a group of Beverly Hills Middle School students before taking stopping at a number of classrooms in the school.

The 1,500 students at Beverly Hills have recently returned to in-person school. They come in the building one day a week on a hybrid schedule. The remaining days are synchronous.

Students at Upper Darby High School are also attending in-person classes on a hybrid schedule. Children in elementary classes have been on a hybrid schedule since January.

The district also offers a fully virtual option for students who do not wish to return to buildings at this time.

At the student roundtable, Cardona broke the ice, asking students "Who is better - LeBron or Jordan?"

"I'm visiting different states across the county to see how the reopening is going," he said. He then asked the students to tell him how the past year has been.



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U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona visits classes at Beverly Hills Middle School.

"The goal of this visit today is really to listen, to bring back to the White House perspectives. We only have one chance to get it right, and what's happening in the schools needs to shape what we do on the federal level, how we provide support, how we lift up with best practices."

— U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona

"It took me a while to get school in sync," said Micah Clark-Kahler. "I didn't have to get up early to walk to school. But then I wasn't talking to anybody. I'm just logging on to a computer."

In Danielle Shalon's seventh-grade math class, Cardona joked with the lone student physically in attendance.

"So how do you feel about

being the only student in here?" he asked. "Pretty good, but you can't put your head down or relax because the teacher will notice."

He then jumped on Shalon's computer to give thumbs up to the 20 students logging in from home.

In Alex Host's sixth-grade social studies class, Cardona asked students in the virtual classroom



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U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona visits classes at Beverly Hills Middle School on Tuesday. He was on hand to promote the Biden administration's efforts to open schools for more in-person learning and in support of the American Rescue Plan.



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Beverly Hills Middle School students make their way through halls on the second week back for in-person classes.



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U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona gives an elbow bump to Ryan Tiernery's class at Beverly Hills Middle School.

what they were learning and joked when one student typed in to ask him if he has a body guard.

"Yes, but they are incognito," he answered. He then switched to the point of the visit.

"How do you feel about being back to school?" he asked. "You can't show off your sneakers from home - it's better to be in school,

right?"

The students agreed.

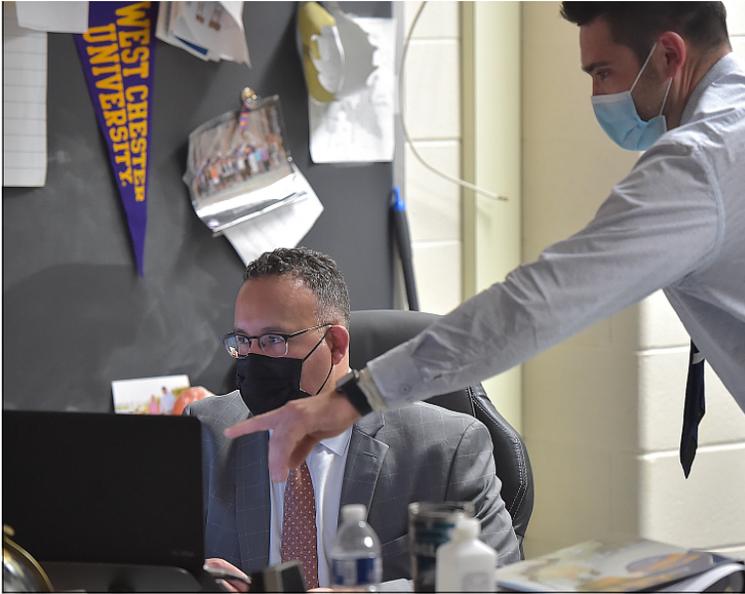
"It's nice to have the kids, it really is," said Host. "The kids really need the social interaction. Sixth grade is such an important year - it's an important transition from the elementary years. There's a lot to learn."

Cardona asked Host how he was holding up during the pandemic.

"Very good," Host said. "I like the challenge."

In Todd Schmitt's math class, Cardona noted the various stages of technology in use. Schmitt was writing problems on the chalk board, while in one corner were televisions from the '80s and in the other corner and back of the room were video cam-

LEARNING » PAGE 5



PETE BANNAN - MEDIANEWS GROUP
U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona is instructed by Social Studies teacher Alex Host in his virtual classes at Beverly Hills Middle School.



PETE BANNAN - MEDIANEWS GROUP
U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona speaks with Beverly Hills Middle School students.



PETE BANNAN - MEDIANEWS GROUP
U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona speaks with Beverly Hills Middle School student Michah Clark-Kahler, 12, on Tuesday at a roundtable discussion to promote the Biden administration's efforts to open schools for more in-person learning and in support of the American Rescue Plan.



PETE BANNAN - MEDIANEWS GROUP
U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona gives the thumbs up to virtual students in Danielle Shalon's seventh-grade math class at Beverly Hills Middle School.



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U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona visits classes at Beverly Hills Middle School Tuesday.

in the future the option for both hybrid and in-person would remain.

Middle school Principal Brian Ursone said the biggest hurdle he has seen has been the fear of the unknown disease.

"Fear is the number one challenge we have faced - fear of the unknown. This (virus) is unprecedented in our lifetimes. We can't see it, we don't know how we can eradicate it. To try to ease those anxieties, ease those fears, and know we're in it together...to build plans together that everyone can agree upon that put people in positions to be safe. I think we did a great job of working with our teams to do that."

High School Principal Kelley Simone said the ability to pivot was very important. She said one success was that everyone has had a voice in the many virtual meetings and discussions.

"You can look at it as a tragedy. You can look at it as a hardship. But then you can also look at it as an opportunity. This has really given us the opportunity to look at things differently and be flexible."

Simone said teachers and families have been working together.

"We work together. It's not separate. We need families to reinforce what we are doing at home and vice versa," she said. "Not all of our families have the same access and so it really has brought to light what we have to do to help families at all different spectrums, all different walks of life, and when you have a district of 12,000, that can be really difficult if you don't have the right support and help."

"Our path back to normalcy is through the children," said school board President Ed Brown. He added that resources continue to be an issue in the district. "We have an amazing district, but imagine what we could do if fully funded."

Learning

FROM PAGE 4

eras which allow students to follow the work at home. Schmitt said he uses chalk because it shows up better online.

Following the tour, Cardona took part in a roundtable discussion with Upper Darby School District Superintendent Dan McGarry, Upper Darby principals, high school students, and board members on les-

sons learned from a year of teaching in the pandemic and how to reopen classes for in-person learning.

Earlier in the day, Cardona held a similar program in Olney.

"The goal of this visit today is really to listen, to bring back to the White House perspectives," Cardona told those in attendance in the school library. "We only have one chance to get it right, and what's happening in the schools

needs to shape what we do on the federal level, how we provide support, how we lift up with best practices."

He said students can return to classes safely when schools can follow the proper guidelines.

"What we are hearing loud and clear from students, educators, parents [is that] the social well-being and sense of community that our kids miss - that is what we need to go back to. We have to do everything in

our power to safely return kids back to school."

Cardona credited teachers for being able to work both virtually and with students in-person.

"They're looking at cameras, looking at faces on the screen, while other students are in front of them," he said. "They're trying their very best and I tip my hat because they've done everything they've had to do to pivot and adapt."

Olivia Chamberlain, a ju-

nior at the high school, said she was happy to be back to in-person classes.

"Recently, I've been struggling to focus. Online just feels so fake to me, which is why I really appreciate having an opportunity to go back, and socialization is definitely really important. I've been missing it a lot," Chamberlain said.

Chamberlain said there were pluses in the variety of learning formats and hoped