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School News



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Covering the Saddleback Valley Unified School District

Volume 4, Issue 15

June 2021

Beauty and the Beast Performance Los Alisos Intermediate School



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Superintendent



Dr. Crystal Turner

As we come to the end of this very unique school year, I reflect on the many challenges and changes we have overcome as a staff and community in order to continue providing a safe and nurturing learning environment for our students. While we began the year in first a Distance Learning model and then quickly transitioned to the Hybrid model, we have since transitioned to a full time on-campus model for our elementary

students and to a four day a week model for our secondary students this spring. Each of these formats required an incredible amount of flexibility, creativity and innovation by SVUSD staff and I'm extremely proud of all their work. Additionally, these new learning models also required the support and flexibility from our families and community which we greatly appreciated. Through it all, our amazing students remained engaged and dedicated to their learning

while adhering to the many health and safety protocols implemented to keep all stakeholders healthy and safe.

While this year did present plenty of challenges, there are also many highlights to be proud of and celebrate. Among them is the selection of Alondra Diaz, Gates Elementary Teacher, by the Orange County Department of Education as a 2022 Orange County Teacher of the Year! Congratulations to Alondra, who is one of five K-12 teachers in all of Orange County to earn this prestigious honor. We wish her luck as she continues on to compete in the California Teacher of the Year program. In the last issue of *School News Roll Call* I recognized our district-wide and site Teachers of the Year, and I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank our Classified Employees of the Year. Below you will find a list of all site and department honorees, as well as the SVUSD District-Wide winners noted with an asterisk. Congratulations to our #svusdheroes!

Classified Employees of the Year

Martha Paz	Cielo Vista Elementary	Pedro Perez	Maintenance, Operations & Construction
Tracee McRane	Child Care Services	Juan Herrera	Montevideo Elementary
Karen Shinozaki-Dol	Community Services	Pamela Takamiya	Mission Viejo High School
Alison Rose	Cordillera Elementary	Marylou Palos	Olivewood Elementary
Eva-Maria Robins	de Portola Elementary	Rachel Ebarb*	Portola Hills Elementary
Terri Lynn	Del Cerro Elementary	Gail Isen	Rancho Canada Elementary
April Cherry	Del Lago Elementary	Kerry Ducoeur	Robinson Elementary
Marie Ferguson	Educational Services	Robin Friedman	Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate
Maria Alarcon	Esperanza Education Center	Fernando Quintino	San Joaquin Elementary
Karen Kazemi	El Toro High School	Linda Kennedy	Santiago STEAM Magnet Elementary
Wilma Marchetta*	Food Services	Linda Knifsend	Serrano Intermediate
Clemente Lazaro, Jr.*	Foothill Ranch Elementary	Marie Bauch*	Services for English Learners
Graciela Avila de Bustos	Gates DLI Elementary	Inderjit Sokhi	Silverado High School
Maria Ucci Provenzano	Glen Yermo Elementary	Lori Puchalski	Special Education
Erica Presby	Human Resources	Tahni Blume	Student Services
Shelly Gravatt	La Madera Elementary	Zaki Haq*	Technology Services
Regino Rojas	La Paz Intermediate I	Mary Pat Daly-Hiller	Trabuco Hills High School
Carol Bellinger	La Tierra Education Center	Tama Adams	Trabuco Elementary
Edgar Cortez	Lake Forest Elementary	Debra Berry	Trabuco Mesa Elementary
Cara Oltman	Laguna Hills High School	Carol Mattoon*	Valencia Elementary
Damaris Campos	Linda Vista IB Magnet Ele		
Sandra O'Neill	Lomarena Elementary		
Dennis Miller*	Los Alisos Intermediate		
Tracy Liberman	Melinda Heights Elementary		

*SVUSD Classified Employee of the Year

Saddleback Valley Unified School District
25631 Peter A. Hartman Way Mission Viejo, CA 92691
(949) 586-1234 • svusd.org

Educational Services

25631 Peter A. Hartman Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-1234



Liza Zielasko
Assistant
Superintendent

Supports for Students

School districts have recently been provided one-time funds from both the Federal and State governments due to the pandemic and the resulting effects experienced by students. There are different spending deadlines for each fund as well as different requirements for allowable expenses. The purpose of these one-time allocations is to address gaps in learning that may have occurred due to COVID-19, to meet the social and emotional needs of students, and to keep students and staff safe with facility upgrades and proper safety protocols in place. A few highlights of the plans for the 2021-22 school year include adding counselors at all levels in order to address mental health and wellness needs. In addition, staff is being increased at all school sites by adding additional credentialed full and part-time teachers and increasing paraprofessional staff. The additional staff will be able to provide much needed intervention, more options for credit recovery, and before and after school intervention support for students. We are looking forward to the 2021-22 school year and welcoming students back to school!

English Learners

25631 Peter A. Hartman Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-1234



Dr. Rowena Mak
Coordinator

Services for English Learners Escribo en Español

SVUSD's Dual Language Immersion program (DLI) at Los Alisos Intermediate School is proud to announce four winners of Escribo en Español, a writing contest organized by the Education Office of the Consulate of Spain and the California Department of Education. This year's topic "My computer: a window to the world"

prompted students to develop an essay or a poem in Spanish about their thoughts, suggestions, perceptions and ideas in a clear, appealing and grammatically correct manner. The contest was open to all California public school students who are studying Spanish. The award differentiates between native and non-native Spanish speaking students and include Diego Tepatzi (7th Spanish Speaker) and Joshua Barney (7th Non-Spanish Speaker) for first place, Madelyn Lescano (8th Spanish Speaker) in 3rd place, and Lilian Mostert (7th Non-Spanish Speaker) for honorable mention in the Grades 6-8 category.

Congratulations to our students at Los Alisos and their teacher, Ms. Amy Mostert!

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Human Resources/Fiscal Services

25631 Peter A. Hartman Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-1234



Connie Cavanaugh
Assistant
Superintendent

Employee Recognition

The District is recognizing the dedication of its employees during the month of May. The Board of Education adopted two resolutions at the May Board meeting to recognize the vital roles of teachers and classified staff.

May 12th was designated by the California State Legislature as the Day of the Teacher. The District recognizes that today's teachers mold the minds and train the workforce of the future, that the teaching profession touches many persons with such a lasting effect, and that good teaching grows in value and pays dividends far beyond the classroom.

May 17th through 21st was designated as Classified School Employee Week. The District recognizes that classified school employees contribute to the establishment and promotion of a positive instructional environment, play a vital role in providing for the welfare and safety of the District's students, and strive for excellence in all areas relative to the educational community.

Many sites had themed and thoughtful events sponsored by their parent-sponsored organizations to recognize the staff at their individual sites.

Operations

25631 Peter A. Hartman Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-1234



Robert Craven
Assistant
Superintendent

Comprehensive Plan

As this most interesting school year comes to a close and we prepare for the 2021-22 school year, there are many exciting projects in the works as well as achievements to acknowledge. To mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 upon the school environment, the District undertook a comprehensive plan that included distributing more than 175,000 disposable masks, 60,000 reusable masks, 9,200 boxes of gloves, 3,500 gallons of hand sanitizer, and over 10,000 gallons of wipes.

Air purifiers were installed in all 1,000 classrooms used by students this year and additional units are being installed in remaining classrooms and large spaces; HVAC units were inspected and maintained on a regular basis, while outdoor hand washing and bottle fill stations were installed on numerous campuses with additional stations being installed this summer.

On the technology side, more than 15,000 chromebooks were distributed to students to access class and lessons from home and school. This enabled instructional continuity for students through the variety of platforms utilized in the classroom. To support the 1:1 chromebook initiative, the technology department provided online, phone, and face-to-face support for families, students, and staff. Phone support saw 7,600 calls, a 50% increase from previous years and online support increased by over 10% with nearly 20,000 help desk tickets.

Finally, Food Services provided meals for students throughout the pandemic, including weekends and holidays. Serving 1.7 million meals through April, an increase of 300,000 meals, Food Services is preparing to continue service for students this summer at a variety of locations. The Facilities, Operations, and Technology Departments plan to build upon the successes of this year, moving forward with a number of facilities projects over the summer and into the upcoming school year that you'll hear more about in the next *School News Roll Call*.

School News

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Covering the
**SADDLEBACK VALLEY
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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562/493-3193 • kay@schoolnewsrollcall.com

ADVERTISING SALES: 562/493-3193

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GRAPHIC DESIGNER/PRODUCTION:

Emily Ung

COPY EDITORS: Kate Karp, Anna Zappia

SOCIAL MEDIA: Nancy Lueder

Netragrednik by Neta Madison

SCHOOL NEWS ROLL CALL, LLC

P.O. Box 728, Seal Beach, CA 90740
562/493-3193

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moulton niguel water district

Cielo Vista *Elementary*

21811 Avenida de Los Fundadores, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688 • 949/589-7456 • svusd.org/cielovista



Dr. Frances Hansell
Principal

Takes a Village

We are so grateful for our community partner ALSV and their generous donation of binders and tool pouches (pencils, highlighters, dry erase markers, tab dividers, glue sticks etc.) Cielo Vista is very grateful for this generous donation for all students to be college and career ready!

The Assistance League of Saddleback Valley (ALSV) is a non-profit organization that offers vital programs that help strengthen the local community in which they serve. The organization serves children and adults in Saddleback Valley through philanthropies, outreach programs, and literacy initiatives. ALSV has a strong partnership with Saddleback Valley Unified School District and provides services as well as supporting teachers and instructional services offered within the district. For more information about our community partner or how to support their philanthropic efforts, please visit www.alsvca.org.

It truly does take a village! Go Hawks!



Terri Torrez, Terry Petersen, Victoria McCaster, and Fran Hansell.

Cordillera *Elementary*

25952 Cordillera Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/830-3400 • svusd.org/cordillera



Jennifer Kajdasz
Principal

It's a team effort around here....

For our final Cordillera *School News Roll Call* article, it is only fitting that it encompasses the celebration for two employees that care about our cougars through and through. Our incredible Mrs. Jill Snyder was honored as our Teacher of the Year and has taught at Cordillera for her entire 25 year teaching career! She has taught, loved, and laughed with approximately 800 children that have come through her doors. She always puts ALL students first! I am also pleased to announce that our amazing Office Manager, Mrs. Alison Rose, was selected as Cordillera's Classified Employee of the Year. Mrs. Rose treats each cougar family as if it were her own. She is always willing to help out a student, staff or parent no matter the situation. Both of these ladies know the importance of supporting the whole child. Congratulations and thank you for all you do!



Alison Rose and Jill Snyder

De Portola *Elementary*

27031 Preciados Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-5830 • svusd.org/deportola



Brendon Morrow
Principal

Teacher of the Year

Meet our Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Rhonee Gaedicke. This is her seventh year in SVUSD and her sixteenth year of teaching. She currently teaches second and third grade distance learning students. In her classroom, student questions and interests become a part of the environment. They are able to make connections between concepts and subjects using a variety of resources. Ms. Gaedicke loves to learn new ideas and strategies from her students while sharing her excitement for learning with them. Her goal is to get students engaged in their learning and excited about coming to school each day for their scholastic adventures.

Mrs. Gaedicke is known by our staff to not only have ideas to solve problems, but also to make herself available as part of the solution. Congratulations to Mrs. Gaedicke for being chosen by her colleagues as our site's Teacher of the Year!



Del Cerro *Elementary*

24382 Regina St., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/830-5430 • svusd.org/delcerro



Kristin Thomsen
Principal

Teacher and Classified Employee of the Year

The Del Cerro staff is committed to ensuring that each child is encouraged and supported every day. This month, all staff were showered

with appreciation. Two staff members selected to represent our school this year are Robyn Fischbach and Terri Lynn.

Mrs. Fischbach, selected as Del Cerro's Teacher of the Year, shares that, "With opening the school as a student in 1971, a parent through the 90's, and teaching here full time since 1997, Del Cerro is my home away from home. Through these many years, some of my favorite teaching moments have come when students' eyes light up at the instant new learning makes sense and they make a connection to their own lives."



Paraprofessional Terri Lynn, was selected as our Classified Employee of the Year. She loves working with young students both with their academics and their social well-being and is a mentor for kindness and lifelong learning.

Del Lago *Elementary*

27181 Entidad, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/855-1125 • svusd.org/dellago



Jonathan Kaplan
Principal

Two Retiring Stars

April Cherry, better known as Miss April, our incredible office manager for 25 years is retiring this June. April first arrived in SVUSD at Del Lago in the fall of 1996, becoming the office manager under principal

Bob Glew. She is the face of Del Lago and will be missed by students, staff, and the community. Also retiring is Lois Connors, a fixture in our upper grades. Lois, or Mrs. Connors, says good-bye to a school she arrived at in 2000. She finished this year as one of our superstar distance teachers, working with both fifth and sixth grade

students, a total of 35 years in the profession! From all of us at Del Lago, we wish both Miss April and Mrs. Connors the very best in all of their future travails. So for one last time for two amazing SVUSD employees, and for always, Go Dolphins!



Lois Connors



April Cherry

El Toro *High School*

25255 Toledo Way, Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/586-6333 • svusd.org/eths



Terri Gusiff
Principal

Senior Field Day

ETHS

Seniors had a fun afternoon of music, food, Cornhole, photo opportunities and a Spikeball tournament! Seniors hung out with friends, enjoyed the wonderful weather and made memories. With only a few weeks of school left this was a day to celebrate our Class of 2021 and the challenging year they have had. It was truly special to see all of their smiling faces!



Esperanza *Special Education*

25121 Pradera Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/830-5470 • svusd.org/esperanza



Raymund Bueche
Principal

A Final Season

As we end quite a remarkable year, we'd like to recognize two excellent teachers who are moving on from the Adult Transition Program. For Michelle Rodriguez and Stacy Eldred, this is their last season. Michelle will be retiring after serving our school for the past three years, and 20 in education.

Michelle quickly adapted her years of teaching to make a difference for ATP students as they developed the skills needed to be independent adults. Whether teaching a vocational lesson or supporting a student in the community, Michelle was focused, methodical, and deliberate. Stacy Eldred will be expanding her teaching to a local community college. Stacy has spent the past nine years at Esperanza fostering a culture of independence for all the students she served. Finding employment opportunities, teaching travel training, and developing an awareness of college. She is student and family-focused. We wish both the best of luck in their next endeavors.



Michelle Rodriguez and Stacy Eldred

Foothill Ranch *Elementary*

1 Torino Dr., Foothill Ranch, CA 92610 • 949/470-4885 • svusd.org/foothillranch



Deborah Shaver
Principal

Teacher and Classified Employee of the Year

Foothill Ranch is proud to celebrate several of our many outstanding employees.

Teacher of the year, Miss Christina Jimenez, is an extraordinary educator who is dedicated to meeting the needs of all learners. She has a passion for collaborating with students, staff and parents to find strategies that help all students succeed. We are also thrilled to announce that our plant foreman, Mr. Clemente Lazaro, was chosen as our Classified Employee of the Year. His dedication to Foothill Ranch is evident in everything he does. His positive personality and servant's heart make him a joy to work with. During our Staff Appreciation Week, we also celebrated our playground assistants. We are so thankful for their dedication to student safety and help implementing all of the COVID safety protocols.

We are so fortunate to have so many amazing staff members at Foothill Ranch!



Gates *Dual Language Immersion Elementary*

23882 Landisview Ave., Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/837-2260 • svusd.org/gates



Diane Clearwater
Principal

Student Leaders

We are so proud of our Gates student leaders who have found a way to lift student spirits in so many ways. Under the leadership of teacher Andrea Rios, 5th and 6th grade in-person and DL student leaders meet regularly to plan school spirit days and

communicate important messages

to our school community. They have made creative themed flipgrid videos to pump students up to do their best on testing, to remind students to find lost library books, to demonstrate school safety, and to encourage participation in school spirit days. They are currently working on a “Happiness Bootcamp” to help with our community’s

social-emotional wellbeing. One of our cabinet members also runs a “Volunteer Squad” and she welcomes all of student leadership to join and support with community service events. Ms. Rios’ is helping to shape our future leaders! Current cabinet members are: President Nadia Mino, Vice President Kierra Fung, Secretary Cora Foellmi, Treasurer Marissa Allen, and Mascot Augie DiRico.



Gates Student Leadership Meeting

Glen Yermo *Elementary*

26400 Trabuco Rd., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-6766 • svusd.org/glenyermo



Jennifer Televik
Principal

Mathematicians in Action

This spring, Glen Yermo teachers have been focused on incorporating open-ended mathematical tasks in their classroom instruction to provide opportunities for students to think critically, develop innovative solutions to problems, and deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts.

In our primary classrooms, students have been experimenting with counting collections of objects by organizing them in different groups or patterns. Teachers are able to have individual conversations with students about their counting process and learn about their thinking and understanding. In our upper grade classrooms, students have been busy tackling real-world problems with fractions and decimals and working through their solutions with models, drawings, and mathematical expressions to represent their thinking. All of our students are eager to share their ideas and collaborate in solving these mathematical tasks.

We are very proud of our Glen Yermo scholars and all they have accomplished this year!



La Madera *Elementary*

25350 Serrano Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/770-1415 • svusd.org/lamadera



Jennifer Gass
Principal

Our Staff and Students Shine

Our school year began like no other. We started the year with distance learning. Later many of our koalas transitioned to campus for our Hybrid Learning model, then back to full day instruction while some remained

Distance Learners all year. Regardless of the instructional model, our students and staff continued to shine. We were thrilled to recognize Mrs. Peterson, La Madera's Teacher of the Year and Mrs. Gravatt, La Madera Classified Employee of the year.

I would like to thank our staff, parents, students and community members for a memorable year. I am inspired by the creative new ways our families came together within the COVID safety guidelines, such as virtual family fun nights, dine out fundraisers, and a virtual science fair!



I wish you all a relaxing and safe summer. I cannot wait to see you all back on campus in the fall.

La Paz *Intermediate*

25151 Pradera Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/830-1720 • svusd.org/lapaz



Jean Walker
Principal

Recipient of Eagle Scout Service Projects

La Paz was chosen as the recipient of several Eagle Scout Service Projects by local Troop 1602! Two Eagle Scouts brothers, Andrew and Matthew Stiverson, beautified the front of La Paz for their tandem service project. Eagle Scout, Andrew Stiverson, combined thriving rose

bushes into a small planter and added English Lavender and Rockrose as companions. Eagle Scout, Matthew Stiverson, redesigned the large planter with California native and drought-tolerant plants such as agave, daisies, and Kangaroo Paw coordinated around a Desert Museum Palo Verde tree. Two additional Eagle Scout Service Projects at La Paz are in the works! Eagle Scouts Cameron Khan, Jake Nilson, and Jason Hatfield will construct benches for outdoor learning and install them on the lawn next to the La Paz Science Building. Eagle Scout, Matthew Bloomgren, will construct sound system carts for the La Paz speaker systems. Thank you Troop 1602!



Laguna Hills *High School*

25401 Paseo de Valencia, Laguna Hills, CA 92653 • 949/770-5447 • svusd.org/lhhs



Bill Hinds
Principal

Springtime at the Nest!

The Nest has been bustling with activity the last few weeks! On Friday, April 30th, the Hawks enjoyed a Movie Night on the Field. A 40-foot screen was set-up on the upper fields and students watched Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle. Movie Night was followed by our Cap and Gown Distribution + Senior Luau. Seniors received their caps and gowns

in preparation for our graduation ceremony. They then attended our first ever Senior Luau complete with lunch, a photo backdrop, and tailgate games. The Hawks then exchanged their hawaiian gear for formal attire for their Spring Festival event held at AV Irvine on Friday, May 14th. Students enjoyed an evening full of music, games, line dancing, a variety of food, and crowning of their Spring Festival King and Queen. The 2020-2021 school year will wrap up with an in-person graduation ceremony on June 3, 2021.



Lake Forest *Elementary*

21801 Pittsford Dr., Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/830-9945 • svusd.org/lakeforest



Audra Bailey
Principal

Lake Forest has an AMAZING staff!

Lake Forest Elementary knows they have phenomenal teachers and staff, and a few have shown brightly this year. Mary Core, the front office clerk, was nominated as one of the top 10 Classified Employees of the Year by Parenting OC Magazine. Her positivity shines when she greets families walking in the front door. She gets to know all of our families by name, and is welcoming to everyone who steps through the front door of Lake Forest Elementary.

Raniah Crail is another bright spot on the Lake Forest campus. She was nominated as one of the top 25 Teachers of the Year by Parenting OC Magazine. Ms. Crail is always thinking outside of the box and stretching her students with her high expectations. She helped mastermind the

opening of Lake Forest's Innovation Lab a couple of years ago, and started a Robotics Club with her colleague, Peggy Aungst (a previous Parenting OC Magazine nominee), last school year. She is a whiz at technology, and always makes sure her classroom is a safe space for her students.

Last, but not least, Dr. Paula Obermeyer was nominated as Lake Forest's Teacher of the Year. Dr. Obermeyer has taken on our 6th grade distance learning class this year, and has a special bond with each and every one of her students. She makes sure her students have a safe space to learn, and challenges them to grow their minds. She has a heart of gold, and makes sure her students have all of the necessary tools to move on to intermediate school.

We are so proud of our shining stars, and have a staff and school filled with them. We are proud to be a Lake Forest Family.

La Tierra *Early Childhood Center*

24150 Lindley St., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/707-5276 • svusd.org/schools/elementary-a-l/la-tierra-early-education-center



Marion Springett
Principal

Let's Play!

La Tierra Early Childhood Center staff and students were thrilled when our playground was re-opened recently after being closed for over a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although our classrooms of students are only visiting the

playground one at a time, and with social distancing guidelines in practice, it has been really great to see our students smiling, laughing, and taking turns on our play equipment once again! One might ask, "Why is play so important?". Through play, children learn to understand one another and to make sense of the world! Play helps children learn to think creatively, it helps



children learn how to problem solve, develop language, and develop both fine and gross motor skills. Play is typically the best avenue for children to learn about themselves and relationships with others, and it lays the foundation for success in life!!

Linda Vista *Magnet Elementary*

25222 Pericia Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/830-0970 • svusd.org/lindavista



Suzy McMasters
Principal

Celebrating Mrs. Campos

Linda Vista Magnet Elementary School celebrates Classified Employee of the Year, Mrs. Damaris Campos. Mrs. Campos has been an integral member of the Linda Vista Magnet family for 18 years. She is an extraordinary instructional assistant, celebrated by her scholars and parents, chosen as the classified

employee of the year by her peers. Damaris is a dedicated, hard working, patient, kind-hearted and passionate person working with our ESL students. Mrs. Campos has gone above and beyond to assist parents and their children in getting connected for distance learning this year. In addition to her work at LVM, Damaris also works with the SVUSD Second Language Department every year to administer the ELPAC test throughout the district. This has been exceptionally challenging this year given the current environment and having to administer the test virtually. She is amazing! We celebrate our Linda Vista Magnet Classified Employee of the Year, Mrs. Damaris Campos!



Lomarena *Elementary*

25100 Earhart Rd., Laguna Hills, CA 92653 • 949/581-1370 • svusd.org/lomarena



Mona Montgomery
Principal

Promoting Literacy at Lomarena

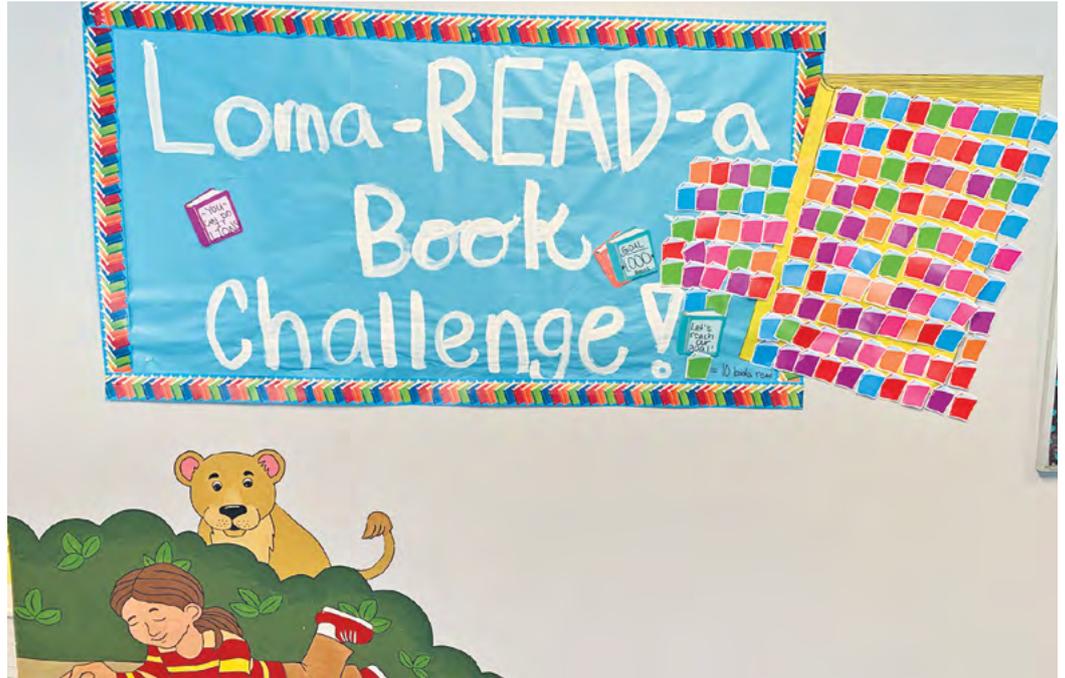
Lomarena recently held our annual LomaREADa month. The challenge that was

given for each class was to read 100 books during the month of April.

A school

wide goal of 500 books was set. Each day, our school stopped, dropped, and read for 15 minutes to promote designated reading time. Students looked forward to fun daily announcements and time to dive into their books each day. LomaREADa is always a fun way to promote literacy for each student

at Lomarena. In true Lion Pride fashion our Lions surpassed their goal and read 1,735 books in the month of April. Way to go lions! You roar!



Los Alisos *Intermediate*

25171 Moor Ave., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/830-9700 • svusd.org/losalisos



Rich Freda
Principal

Beauty and the Beast – Welcome Back Families and Friends

After 14 months, we finally held our first on-campus event. The natural lighting set a perfect stage for our drama class' performance of Beauty and the Beast.

Teacher and director, Chris

Hixon, made an impactful connection between the story and our pandemic: "Beauty and the Beast is 'a tale as old as time.' And yet, this story has taken on a whole new meaning for me during this era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic showed its beastly head last Spring and we have since been trapped, just waiting

until we can be human again." As you can see, our amazing 8th grade students created a Be Our Guest moment as parents, family members and friends were able to celebrate our students' hard work in a hard year. We look forward to continue to open our castle doors to our families and guests as we slowly and safely return back to normal.



Melinda Heights *Elementary*

21001 Rancho Trabuco, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688 • 949/888-7311 • svusd.org/melindaheights



Kathryn Martin
Principal

Joy Drive for #Team NEGU

As we look back on the 2020-2021 school year, we proudly congratulate our Melinda Heights Mountain Lions on a job well done. This has been an historic year; students and their families have proven over and over that perseverance pays off. Our staff and families have made it their

mission to create a safe, comfortable, supportive space for all children. Whether in distance learning or face-to face, our Mountain Lions have beaten the odds and blossomed during this unprecedented time. Despite the many safety rules and regulations, our parents continually supported their children academically, socially, and emotionally. We have learned many lessons this year, including how to put the needs of others ahead of our own. Families, students, and teachers have made amazing strides by rolling up their sleeves and working hard to make this memorable year one of JOY at Melinda Heights. Never Ever Give Up!



Mission Viejo *High School*

25025 Chrisanta Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/837-7722 • svusd.org/mvhs



Tricia Osborne
Principal

Prestigious International Baccalaureate Program

Mission Viejo High School is proud to celebrate our International Baccalaureate (IB) Class of 2021. MVHS is the first high school in Orange County granted affiliation with the prestigious IB program. The IB

Diploma is highly regarded in the United States and throughout

the world for its rigorous curriculum and emphasis on international mindedness. These distinguished graduates will be attending schools such as UC Berkeley, UCLA, UCSD, UCI, UC Riverside, University of Pennsylvania, Northeastern University, Indiana University, Loyola Marymount, and The Air Force Academy, among others.

The IB is a comprehensive program for highly motivated students, sponsored and administered by the International Baccalaureate

Organization. The IB Diploma is awarded to students who complete a challenging course of study featuring examination in six academic areas: Studies in Language, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, and one elective. Students also complete a 4,000 word thesis. Academic studies are enhanced through creative, athletic, and social service activities. Go Diablos!



Montevideo *Elementary*

24071 Carrillo Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-8050 • svusd.org/montevideo



Lisa Graham
Principal

Even Better Together!

Just when we think we have firm mathematical understandings, we find that in life, sometimes, one plus one can equal one. As Montevideo Elementary merges with a sister school, Cordillera Elementary, we will no longer be two schools, but one amazing school... and we are excited! Our schools have much in common already: high expectations, monitoring of instructional goals, meaningful instruction with creative projects, Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), strong home-school relations, and parent involvement. We also share a love of the arts as Class Act Schools. As we join together for the better, we are looking at combining the best of both to create one school with a shared spirit of the mountaineer and the cougar. Cordillera will bring its love of grade level gardens, and Montevideo will provide additional student leadership opportunities. We are looking forward to more friends, and a partnership in learning and growing together!



Olivewood *Elementary*

23391 Dune Mear Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/837-6682 • svusd.org/olivewood



Alex Perez
Principal

Battle of the Books

Even though the 2020 – 2021 school year was full of changes and adjustment, one thing that we were able to continue was our participation in Battle of the Books. Fergy, Maria, Jacqueline, and Annika who were members of the team, collaborated on writing about their experience.

Battle of the Books (BOB) is a reading club for 4th and 5th graders that allows students to compete against other schools in Orange County. Our Bob members read and discussed 20 chapter books. The Olivewood BOB team showed teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration at the tournament in April.

The BOB tournament was different this year because our competition was virtual. We have gotten really good at Zooming! Participating in the Battle of the Books this year was a fun and rewarding experience for all of us!



Fergy Rodriguez PU, Maria Manalese, Jacqueline Duarte, and Annika Boyboy.

Portola Hills *Elementary*

19422 Saddleback Ranch Rd., Trabuco Canyon, CA 92679 • 949/459-9370 • svusd.org/portolahills



Ed MacNevin
Principal

Congratulations Mrs. Padian!

Our teacher of the year at Portola Hills is Mrs. Padian. Mrs. Padian grew up in a family of teachers. Her first job was in an English immersion kindergarten/first grade combination class. After her family moved to Foothill Ranch, she realized she wanted to teach in the same district

where her children attended school. Mrs. Padian presently teaches a Kindergarten/First Grade combination class at Portola Hills Elementary. The principal recently asked Mrs. Padian's students to share what they liked best about their teacher. All of Mrs. Padian's students' hands were quickly raised. One kindergarten student exclaimed, "I like that she teaches us how to sound out words." A first-grade student shared, "I like that she gives me tough math challenge work and helps me understand if I get stuck." The entire staff is proud to have Mrs. Padian represent Portola Hills as their teacher of the year.



Principal MacNevin, Mrs. Padian, and Dr. Turner

Rancho Canada *Elementary*

21801 Winding Way, Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/786-5252 • svusd.org/ranchocanada



Dr. Larry Hausner
Principal

Thank you Mrs. Runella

Current Rancho PTA President Mrs. Katie Runella is concluding her second and final year as Rancho PTA President. She has led the organization to new heights and recognizes the true collaborative spirit that makes our PTA a success. "I believe the PTA fulfills an important and much needed opportunity to provide programs and resources that encourage and promote the academic, emotional and mental well being of all students and families. It also helps to bridge the gap between the school and families to encourage a partnership that results in stronger schools and communities," said Mrs. Runella.

She continued to say, "The Rancho Cañada PTA is a special group of dedicated parents, school staff and an entire community of families who never stop finding ways to volunteer (this last year virtually!) and make our school a better place to be. It is truly a team effort led by our amazing board and chairs who work tirelessly to make our PTA and school what it is . . . a family."



Rancho Santa Margarita *Intermediate*

21931 Alma Aldea, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688 • 949/459-8253 • www.rsmintermediate.com



Tyler Morgan
Principal

Classified Greatness!

Ask Robin Friedman for anything and her answer is always, “I can do that!” Robin’s customer service and leadership are always on display. Of her many attributes, Robin is courteous, detailed, professional, and caring and she always seeks to build a better

RSM student experience. Robin is a great team player and goes above and beyond her duties to support the RSM community, staff, and teachers; she is truly well-liked and respected. Robin has great ideas that we constantly implement and she works tirelessly in order to make sure our classes are balanced and our master schedule best serves our students. What I like most about Robin is her ability to care for students and the friendliness she exudes in all her interactions. We are so lucky to have Robin as a member of the RSM family and are thrilled to celebrate her as RSM’s Classified Employee of the Year!



Robinson *Elementary*

21400 Lindsay Dr., Trabuco Canyon, CA 92679 • 949/589-2446 • svusd.org/robinson



Megan Hannen
Principal

Classified Employee of the Month

This month we are highlighting our Classified Employee of the Month, Kerry Ducoeur. She is one of highly valued SAI Classroom Instructional Aides. She is dedicated to our students here at Robinson and ensures that all

students have equitable access to their grade level curriculum. Currently, Kerry is working in Susan Blinn’s Kinder – 3rd Grade SAI Classroom where she works one-on-one with students. She also takes on the role of creating fun and engaging lessons in collaboration with the teacher. Children trust her and make great strides when they are learning with her. She is a shining star here at Robinson and we are so lucky to have her on our team of Instructional Aides. Kerry has been a dedicated SVUSD employee for the last 14 years. This month, we celebrate her and her contributions to our amazing school!



San Joaquin *Elementary*

22182 Barbera, Laguna Hills, CA 92653 • 949/581-3450 • svusd.org/sanjoaquin



David Shun
Principal

Celebrating our Teachers of the Year

San Joaquin is excited to share that two teachers were recognized as 2021 Teachers of the Year! Mrs. Karla Turner was named San Joaquin's Teacher of the Year and Miss Katelyn Thompson was named a Top 10 Teacher of the Year for Parenting OC Magazine.

"I am honored to receive the Teacher of the Year Award at San Joaquin. I truly love my students and am passionate about providing them with a safe, engaging, learning environment. Watching their minds and their spirits grow fills me with joy each day," Mrs. Turner shared.

About her nomination, Miss Thompson said, "Through these challenging circumstances I have continuously endeavored to foster a positive and inclusive atmosphere where students will continue to thrive as lifelong learners. I feel so fortunate to be recognized."

San Joaquin is very proud of both of our teachers and their commitment to student success.



Katelyn Thompson and Karla Turner

Santiago *STEAM Magnet*

24982 Rivendell Dr., Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/586-2820 • svusd.org/santiago



Howard Johnston
Principal

Get in GEAR!

This has been a challenging year for all. But, through it all Santiago teachers and staff have persevered and thrived! They have put the safety of students first and instruction was not far behind. Through the reworking of all their Project-based Learning units to suit Distance Learning and the

Hybrid model, and a focus on each student's social-emotional well being, Santiago students are well positioned to have an amazing 21-22 school year.

Santiago is also putting the finishing touches on their Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) system which will begin Day One of next year. "Get in GEAR!" is their motto (I am Grateful. I am Engaged. I am Accountable. I

am Reflective). Students will receive "GEAR Tickets" for modeling any of their four behavioral expectations. GEAR Tickets can be turned in for intrinsic rewards.

Lastly, please remember to enroll your incoming students to SVUSD by visiting, <https://www.svusd.org/register-now>.



Serrano *Intermediate*

24642 Jeronimo Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630 • 949/586-3221 • svusd.org/serrano



David Young
Principal

Success at State Science & Engineering Fair

Serrano STEAM Village students, Hussein Hirani, Tarini Neeladaran (pictured) and Lara Tseng represented Serrano at April's California Science and Engineering Fair (SEF). Six student groups/projects competed at Serrano's SEF in February, and all six moved on to the County competition. There Hussein took first place in the Fluids and

Aerodynamics category; Tarini took home top honors in Electricity and Electronics; Lara Tseng also placed first in Zoology.

In addition to this, Lara received the California Association of Professional Scientists award, and Tarini received a special award from the Office of Naval Research. They each received the Arnold & Mabel Beckman Foundation/Chapman Award and have been invited to the Broadcom MASTERS.

At the state fair--Tarini Neeladaran and Lara Tseng placed third in their categories, and Hussein Hirani took home second in his category.

In addition to this Tarini won a special award from Raytheon Technologies and received a \$1,250 prize!



Silverado *High School*

25632 Peter A. Hartman Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-8800 • svusd.org/silverado



David Gordon
Principal

"May the 4th be with you" PBIS Raffle

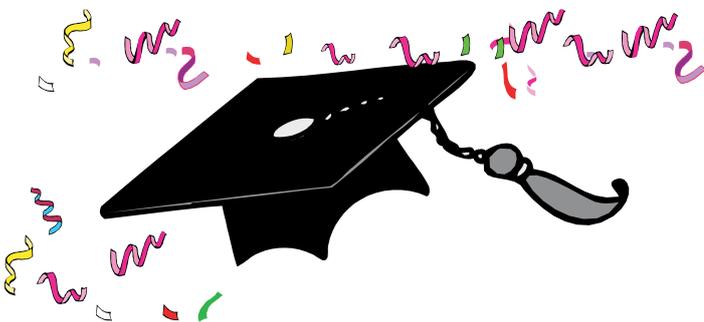
Silverado High School has had a busy month! Kellytoy, the creators of the immensely popular Squishmallows, and their Kellytoy Cares division, made a huge donation to the Silverado PBIS Program. SHS received over 300 Squishmallows and a monetary donation to support the PBIS program. PBIS has helped to bring down our suspension rate. Supporting the PBIS program helps to keep kids in school.

Our "May the 4th be with you" PBIS raffle was a big hit. Two twenty inch Star Wars Squishmallows were auctioned off. Jonathan Martines won the Chewbacca Squishmallow and Anthony Salas won the baby Yoda Squishmallow.

SHS partnered with OCS D and was able to provide over 100 families in need with food and supplies.

Silverado celebrated teachers and our teacher of the year, Rachael Curtis. We also celebrated our classified staff and our classified staff person of the year, Pinky Sokhi.

Silverado is excited to be planning an in person graduation ceremony! This year Silverado will hold its graduation ceremony at Laguna Hills High School.



Congratulations
Class of 2021!

SVUSD *Virtual Academy K-12*

21001 Rancho Trabuco Rd., Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688 • 949/580-3457 • svusd.org/virtualacademy



Glenn Giokaris
Principal

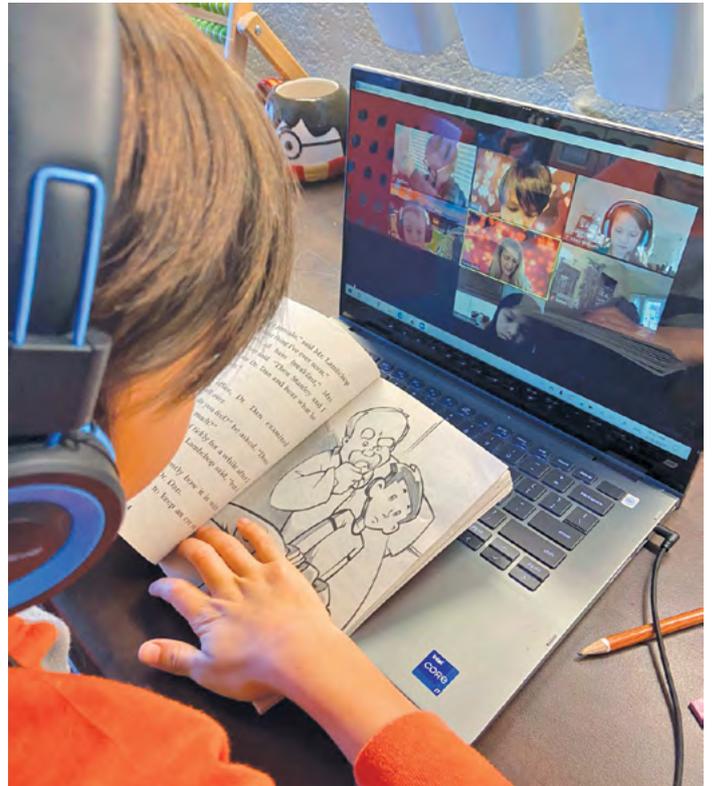
Improving to Better Support our Students

“You can’t control the waves, but you can learn how to surf”. Jon Kabat Zinn’s quote sums up our year! Even though the SVUSD Virtual Academy (SVA) is an online school, the waves caused by COVID-19 had SVA surfing! We surfed our significant increase in enrollment, added teachers, implemented Canvas and many new learning apps, and new curriculum tools to better support our students.

Fortunately, by surfing the waves of COVID, SVA improved. In partnering with parents and students, collaborating as a team of educators, and working to align our actions with our mission and vision, SVA has improved our ability to:

- engage students in a relevant, personalized, and flexible online curriculum,
- to empower students to take ownership of their education,
- and to keep community as the foundation of our school so that students feel supported and that they belong.

Please visit our website for more information!



Trabuco *Elementary*

31052 Trabuco Canyon Rd., Trabuco Canyon, CA 92678 • 949/858-0343 • svusd.org/trabuco



Lisa Paisley
Principal

STEAM Partnerships

Trabuco had many winners at the STEAM ExPO 2020. The winners spanned all grade levels and included school teams and individual or family home projects. Our Coyotes embraced the art and creativity of engineering. Just this spring, we were delighted to be able

to give one trophy to our team, called “The Wave”, who won first place for their 3rd grade Rube Goldberg contraption, designed to turn off a light. This picture is very representative of its time. The original team consisted of four 3rd graders, three of whom made the decision to learn virtually this year. We sure miss seeing teams collaborate the way they did. There is nothing better than hearing the cheers when a machine actually works. We love that despite all this year brought our way, a trophy made its way from the minds of high school engineers, down to our elementary engineers. Innovation goes on!



Trabuco Hills *High School*

27501 Mustang Run, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/768-1934 • svusd.org/thhs



Alicia Foulk
Principal

Unified Sports

It's been an exciting year for Unified at THHS! They have been meeting weekly on zoom for Unified Sports, as our partners have been socializing together and learning more about Unified Soccer, Unified

Flag Football, and Unified Basketball through videos and interactive activities virtually. We also started a Unified Esports club for the first time in Southern California! Our students worked together as teams and played a Rocket League season for 8 weeks! It was so successful that THHS started Unified Esports Community Game Nights for all OC Schools and started a THHS Esports league through the CIF Initiative. We're also in

the middle of our Unified Track and Field season and had our first dual meet with MVHS Unified on April 29th! Both teams worked hard, ran fast, and enjoyed every minute!



Trabuco Mesa *Elementary*

21301 Ave de las Flores, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688 • 949/858-3339 • svusd.org/trabucomesa



Caryn McGrew
Principal

Teacher of the Year – Ms. Evans

Congratulations to Trabuco Mesa's Teacher of the Year, Ms. Ashley Evans! Ms. Evans is an outstanding, innovative educator. She creates an excellent learning environment for her 4th grade students by engaging them in collaborative activities, using technology as a tool to enhance

instruction, and providing a positive classroom community. Ashley makes strong connections with students and families. When asked why they think their teacher was Teacher of the Year her students said, "Ms. Evans is a great teacher! She never doubts us about anything and always says we can do it. She understands when you make a mistake and helps you fix it. She does not give us homework on Fridays!" Ms. Evans is a valuable member of our site leadership team and participates in ongoing professional development. She is a GATE and Google Certified Educator, and we are so thankful she is part of our Trabuco Mesa Staff!



Valencia *Elementary*

25661 Paseo de Valencia, Laguna Hills, CA 92653 • 949/830-3650 • svusd.org/valencia



Wendie Hauschild
Principal

Expansive Classified Staff

It takes teamwork to make the dream work! We all know that Valencia's teachers and other Certificated staff are second to none, but did you know that we have an expansive Classified staff at Valencia, each of whom is integral to the success of our students? Our Office team, Custodial team, Instructional Aides, Playground Assistants, Librarian, Tech support, and Food Service team have been indispensable to the success of this very different year. As we first prepared for Distance Learning, then Hybrid, then the return to full-day in-person learning, they all asked, "What else can I do to help?" Whether it was providing extra supervision, marking social distance marks on lines and tables, manning drive-by text pick-ups,

solving tech challenges, or serving thousands of lunches – and everything in between – our Classified staff was nothing short of magic. They have hearts of service and we thank them for their dedication to our students.



Fun Things and Places–Word Search Contest

Rules! One word in the list is NOT in the word search.

When you have completed the word search, one word will be left and that word you email to: Kay@schoolnewsrollcall.com Please put Saddleback in the subject line.

Entries must be received by July 15, 2021

From the correct entries one name will be drawn to win a \$20 gift card to Barnes & Noble

Thank you [Barkate Orthodontics](http://www.BarkateSmiles.com) for sponsoring the contest.
www.BarkateSmiles.com

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| CARNIVAL | CAMP |
| HOME | SEASHORE |
| SCHOOL | FARM |
| PARK | ZOO |
| SLIDES | HIKE |
| SWINGS | BIKE RIDE |
| ROAD TRIP | REUNION |
| PARTY | CRUISE |
| MOVIE | SKATING |
| POOL | VIDEOS |
| FOREST | |

Congratulations to Herran Abraham
Winner of our April Word Search Contest!

L	A	V	I	N	R	A	C	G	U	Z	C	V	U	F
S	R	M	T	Y	T	R	A	P	S	Q	L	X	W	S
K	E	D	H	N	U	K	M	F	E	G	Z	R	W	I
A	U	A	T	I	T	B	P	V	D	U	I	I	I	G
T	N	C	S	E	K	R	A	P	I	L	N	O	C	R
I	I	E	E	H	M	E	I	V	L	G	G	H	E	I
N	O	Z	R	L	O	O	H	C	S	U	C	Q	J	U
G	N	B	O	P	L	R	H	O	Q	B	R	Z	U	Y
F	W	O	F	O	S	C	E	I	V	O	M	Z	N	R
E	P	Z	P	H	Q	D	E	D	I	R	E	K	I	B
O	U	A	W	R	I	B	L	H	A	Z	Z	L	S	P
Y	Z	W	V	V	G	C	B	F	A	K	A	H	D	Z

David's Review



David H.

Save Little Claws!

Title: *The Animal Rescue Agency #1:*

Case File: *Little Claws*

Author: Eliot Schrefer

If you love animals like I do, you should definitely read this book.

Esquire Fox and Mr. Pepper the rooster run the Animal Rescue Agency, which rescues animals in trouble all around the world. Little Claws, a cute polar bear cub, is stranded on an iceberg that is floating away from his mom, Big Claws. This dangerous situation is caused by a man in a white fur hat. Big Claws contacts the Animal Rescue Agency for help. Join Esquire Fox and Mr. Pepper on their daring adventure to discover WHO the man in the white hat is, WHAT he wants to do, and find out if Little Claws gets reunited with his mom.

You'll love reading this exciting book!



David is in third grade and he loves to read and play piano. He likes math and outdoor activities such as rock climbing, tennis, and basketball.

Kailani's Review



Kailani T.

Favorite Tree House Adventure

Monday with a Mad Genius

by Mary Pope Osborne is the 10th book in the series Magic Tree House. It is about two siblings of Frog Creek, Pennsylvania (Jack and Annie) who go back in time by the magic tree



house. Their mission is to help a magician named Merlin of Camelot find the secret of happiness. During the journey, the siblings travel to Florence, Italy and meet Leonardo DaVinci in the 1500s. Jack and Annie watch DaVinci fly the Great Bird and finish the Mona Lisa painting.

This was a fun book to read. The story is full of excitement and interesting information. I learned about Mona Lisa and Leonardo DaVinci. Reading that DaVinci was also an inventor, architect, stage and costume designer, horseman, chef, geologist, and botanist was fascinating. My favorite parts are when Jack and Annie figured out the secret of happiness and that DaVinci was also a horseman. I highly recommend this book for anyone who loves adventures.

Kailani is a 3rd grader who loves to read. When not playing with her baby brother, Kailani likes to color and draw. She started taking Spanish lessons while sheltering-in-place. Horseback riding and skate boarding are the new activities she enjoys. Hope everyone stays well and healthy.

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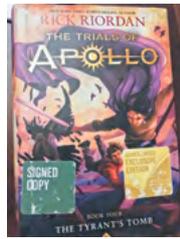
Sean's Book Review



Sean

The Tomb of a Dead Emperor

The Tyrant's Tomb is the fourth book in Rick Riordan's series, *Trials of Apollo*. Apollo (aka Lester Papadopoulos) was banished from Mount Olympus (home of the Greek Gods) by the



almighty Zeus. During his exile, he experienced many adventures and losses. Meg, his 12 year-old gifted assistant, travels with him to a Roman demi-god camp, where they are greeted by lots of old war friends. Apollo has a vision and tells the camp to prepare for a gruesome war caused by two evil Roman emperors, both with whom Apollo had treacherously fought recently. He then needs to go on a dangerous journey investigating a Roman ghost tomb for crucial information. The vivid details of the battle preparation and fighting scenes are riveting. Overall, this book is a solid 5/5 and I hope you eventually read this amazing series!

Sean is a 6th grader who enjoys playing basketball and volleyball. He loves to teach his dog, Chewie, tricks and taking him on walks. His favorite subjects at school are math and PE. The best thing about quarantine was spending time with his family in nature.

Daniel's Review



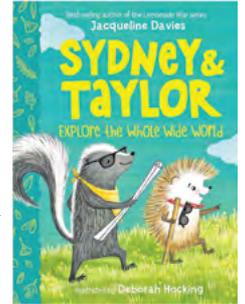
Daniel H.

Cute Friends' Adventure

Title: *Sydney & Taylor Explore the Whole Wide World*

Author: Jacqueline Davies

Do you ever feel like you want to go on a big adventure? The best friends in this book do and they go on one together.



Sydney, a skunk, and his best friend Taylor, a hedgehog, live together in a cozy burrow. One day, they decide to leave their home for the first time ever to go on an expedition to places unknown in the outside world. Along the way, they discover new things and meet different animals. They also run into some problems, but they help each other out and make things better.

This book teaches you that friends help each other and no matter how much fun you have in new places, home is always the best place to be!

Daniel is in first grade and he likes to spend time with his family playing board games, reading, and playing sports like tennis, soccer, and basketball.

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Taegyong's Book Review



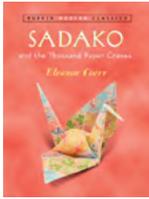
Taegyong K.

Sadako's Wish

Title: *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*

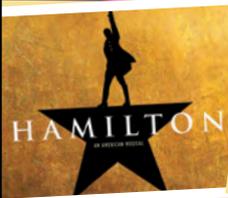
Author: Eleanor Coerr

Have you ever heard about the myth of one thousand paper cranes? This story is based on the real story of Sadako Sasaki and the thousand paper cranes. Sadako loved running. However, she got the atomic disease, and she couldn't run anymore. One day, her friend, Chizuko, showed her how to make a paper crane and said, "If a sick person folds one thousand paper cranes, the gods will grant her wish and make her healthy again." She gave Sadako the paper crane that she folded as the first one. Then, she decided to make one thousand paper cranes to make her well. Did she fold one thousand paper cranes? Did her wish come true? This book is not only about Sadako's story, but also about the horrors and tragedy of war. This is a touching and inspirational story. If you are interested in her story, I recommend this book.



Taegyong K. is a 5th grader. She loves reading books and writing her own stories. Also, she likes to play video games, board games, and badminton. She would like to be a person who is kind and helps others.

The Center Stage Studio Summer Performance Camps + Intensives!





the center stage studio

Day Camps (ages 5 - 13)

Monday - Friday 9 am - 3 pm

- June 7 - 11: Zombies 2
- June 14 - 18: Greatest Showman
- June 21-25: Hamilton
- June 28-July 2: High School Musical
- July 5 - 9: Greatest Showman
- July 12-16: Zombies 2
- July 19-23: HP Goblet of Fire
- July 26-30: Minions, The Rise of Gru!
- Aug 2- 6: High School Musical
- Aug 9-13: Hamilton
- Aug 16-20: Goblet of Fire





Night Camps (ages 9+)

Mon - Thurs 3:30 pm - 8 pm / Fri 5 pm - 8 pm / Sat. Show Day! 10 am - 12 pm

- June 14 - 18: Triple Threat Team Taster
- June 21-25: Mean Girls
- July 5 - 9: Julie & The Phantom
- July 12-16: Into the Woods
- July 26-30: Team Boot Camp
- Aug 2- 6: Triple Threat Team Taster

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Basics of Skateboarding Skate Camps

Spring 2021	Summer 2021
<p>San Clemente Tuesdays/Thursdays 3:30-5:30 March 16th-25th #66492 April 20th-29th #66493 May 18th-27th #66494</p>	<p>San Clemente June 8th-August 13th Tuesday-Friday, 9-11am Beginner Class \$163 Tuesday-Friday, 11am-12pm Intermediate Class \$75</p>
<p>Ladera Ranch Tuesday/Thursdays 3:00-5:00 March 16th-25th April 20th-29th May 18th-27th</p>	<p>Ladera Ranch June 8th-August 13th Tuesday-Friday, 9am-11am \$145 or \$120 with cash</p>
<p>Laguna Hills Saturdays 9-11am March-May</p>	<p>Laguna Hills June 8th-August 13th Tuesday-Friday, 9am-11am \$150</p>





Unprecedented Disruptions



Dr. Al Mijares
Superintendent

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruptions to our communities, at times making it feel as if our lives were suspended indefinitely. And yet, schools in Orange County found ways to move forward.

In October, our county was credited with the largest return to school for a major metropolitan area in California. About six months later, 21 local middle and high schools have earned the state's highest level of recognition as 2021 California Distinguished Schools, a title annually granted to campuses that demonstrate exceptional student performance and narrow achievement gaps.

Orange County was also well-represented on the annual list of the country's best high schools published by U.S. News & World Report, with Oxford Academy ranking No. 1 in California and No. 11 nationally.

Despite the challenges, our schools, students and staff continued to earn distinction through one of the most trying years in modern history. At the same time, far too many children and families struggled under the weight of the pandemic, with an untold number of students facing hurdles to remote learning.

While we're not out of the pandemic woods yet, COVID-19 transmission rates have plummeted thanks to modern science and this county's vigilance, enabling an increasing number of students to return to their classrooms five days a week. In fact, school districts are now eagerly making plans for the start of the next school year, and many will offer robust accelerated learning programs this summer.

For its part, the Orange County Department of Education, which provides direct instruction to the county's most vulnerable students and supports local districts with services necessary for their operations, will prioritize three critical areas in the 2021-22 school year:

- Accelerating student learning with a focus on in-person instruction while building on the technological innovations developed during the pandemic
- Supporting the mental and physical health and wellbeing of students, staff and families
- Promoting civic learning and engagement opportunities that equip students to contribute to healthy, just and thriving communities

Each of these objectives aligns with our department's ongoing mission, vision and values, and we believe we have a strong infrastructure in place to successfully check these boxes.

In 2016, the state selected OCDE as the lead agency in an initiative to help schools and districts implement the California Multi-Tiered System of Support framework, which aligns new and existing strategies to meet students' academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs.

MTSS may look different depending on each school's strengths, but the idea is to empower educators to intervene and resolve issues before they become barriers to learning. The MTSS framework builds a baseline level of support for all students, additional assistance for some, and targeted interventions for those with the greatest needs. And it starts with knowing the name, face and story of every student at a school.

Recognizing that depression and anxiety were on the rise even before the pandemic, OCDE's education and health experts have also been working with our local schools and districts to specifically address the complex mental needs of students. Along with creating new resources for families, our teams regularly offer no-cost trainings for educators covering trauma-informed support, substance abuse prevention, social-emotional learning, restorative practices and suicide risk assessment.

Finally, we continue to build collaborative partnerships with legal professionals and local business leaders who can help students engage civically with their local communities.

In 2019, OCDE launched the Orange County Civic Learning Partnership with the goal of equipping the next generation with the rights and responsibilities that are foundational to American democracy. Since then, educational leaders in California have further incentivized civic awareness by creating a Seal of Civic Engagement that students can earn for their diplomas, transcripts or certificates of completion.

The new seal was the focus of a virtual symposium in April that brought together nearly 75 educators, law professionals and community leaders for a meaningful discussion on how to deepen students' Constitutional knowledge and amplify civic engagement.

This past year has tested all of us in ways previously thought unimaginable, taxing our bodies as well as our minds. Yet the pandemic has also revealed our collective resiliency. As educators, we are driven by a noble purpose and a spirit that cannot be defeated by a virus. We have been called to shape this generation of young learners into the leaders of tomorrow, and we will do exactly that.

The challenges ahead are real and they are fierce. But our eyes are clear and so are our goals for the year ahead. And on that basis, there has never been a better time to be in education.