

School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation

Covering the Saddleback Valley Unified School District



Volume 7, Issue 24

February 2024

Making Connections with Students: High Five for SVUSD Food Services!



SVUSD Nutritionist, Jordyn Granger, and the fabulous SVUSD Food Services team make learning about healthy food choices fun with events like The Taste of Santiago inspired snacks such as sour patch grapes.

FREE PROGRAMS

FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS



WATER AWARENESS POSTER CONTEST

Calling all Orange County students in Grades K-12! Dive into creativity with our Water Awareness Poster Contest. The mission: showcase the value of our most precious natural resource - water - through art for your chance to win an iPad. Teachers, make it a class project and be entered to win a free water lesson for your students!



WATERSHED FIELD TRIPS

Moulton Niguel Water District partners with the Orange County Coastkeeper to bring water education inside and outside of the classroom for middle school and high school students. Funding covers in-class presentation, field trip, and busing.



PROJECT W.E.T. (WATER EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS)

Moulton Niguel Water District partners with the Water Education Foundation to provide water education training (Project WET) and NGSS-aligned curriculum to educators.

ONLINE EDUCATION CENTER

Moulton Niguel Water District has an online education center that offers a variety of engaging, informative activities for the entire family to enjoy! Choose from interactive modules, entertaining videos and activity booklets to learn about the water cycle, water conservation, healthy watersheds and more.



QUESTIONS?



949-831-2500



outreach@mnwd.com



mnwd.com/education

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Numerous Accolades Make SVUSD Proud



Dr. Crystal Turner
Superintendent

The drive for academic, extracurricular, and innovative excellence amongst our students and staff continually shape and mold the success story of Saddleback Valley Unified School District (SVUSD). The dedication of our educators coupled with the hard work of our students, along with the support of their families, has resulted in numerous accolades that make SVUSD proud.

Each year, teachers are chosen by their peers to represent their site as a Teacher of the Year. SVUSD's teachers are dedicated to equitable, intentional, and engaging practices that provide opportunities for each and every student to be successful. They create a supportive culture in which the potential of every student is nurtured. I am pleased to celebrate these passionate and dedicated educators:

Kimberly Smith	de Portola Elementary School
Mark Smith	La Madera Elementary School
Lisa Brooks	La Paz Intermediate School
Jordyn Karr	La Tierra Early Childhood Center
Britni Hart	Lake Forest Elementary School
Sydney Ross	Lomarena Elementary School
Frank Werner	Los Alisos Intermediate School
Stephanie Vaughan	Melinda Heights Elementary School
Jason Bussinger	Montevideo Elementary School
Jacqueline Fung	Ralph A. Gates Elementary School
Valerie Messano	Rancho Cañada Elementary School
Diedra Flynn	Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School
Katie Paulsen	San Joaquin Elementary School
Nadia Mudd	Serrano Intermediate School
Conor McAlinney	Trabuco Elementary School

From the above group of honorees, three teachers are chosen to represent SVUSD in the Orange County Teacher of the Year selection process. Congratulations to teachers Lisa Brooks, Valerie Messano, and Conor McAlinney for this distinction!

It is exciting to share with you some other recent accomplishments of SVUSD staff and students:

- El Toro High School (ETHS) counselor, Carlyn Marones, earned the title of OCDE School Counselor of the Year.
- Mission Viejo High School (MVHS) Football Coach, Chad Johnson, was named Max Preps Coach of the Year.
- MVHS Football took home the CIF State Division 1-AA Championship!
- Trabuco Hills High School's (THHS) Dennis Kelly was named OC Register Girls Cross Country Coach of the Year.
- THHS student-athlete Holly Barker was named *OC Register* Girls Cross Country Athlete of the Year.
- Three student-athletes were chosen to participate on the OC Girls Flag Football All Stars: Avery Brewster (MVHS), Rebecca Johnson (ETHS), and Maya McKenna (THHS).
- THHS student, Grace Regier, achieved one of the few perfect ACT Composite scores in Orange County.
- The Orange County Music and Arts Administrator Awards (OCMAA) chose student Lindsay Keith's artwork to grace the cover of their program.
- OCMAA awarded SVUSD music teachers Susan Lord in Secondary Theatre and Athena Reyes in Elementary Music.
- THHS Thundering Mustangs Marching Band won the 2023 1A/2A/3A State Level Grand Championship for the Western Band Association.

We truly have a lot to celebrate here in SVUSD!

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



Kay Coop
Founder/Publisher



Netragrednik

School News

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www.schoolnewsrollcall.com

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FOUNDER/PUBLISHER: Kay Coop
562/493-3193 • schoolnewskay@gmail.com

ADVERTISING SALES: 562/493-3193

CONTENT COORDINATOR: Barbra Longiny

GRAPHIC DESIGNER/PRODUCTION:

Emily Ung and Mie Kawamura

COPY EDITORS: Kate Karp, Anna Zappia

SOCIAL MEDIA: Nancy Lueder

Netragrednik by Neta Madison



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SCHOOL NEWS ROLL CALL, LLC

P.O. Box 728, Seal Beach, CA 90740

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Happy New Year!
Superintendent Dr. Crystal Turner begins this issue highlighting the district's many accolades. Congratulations to the honorees.

Throughout this issue you will read heartwarming articles about the importance of community and caring for others. Students held fundraising events to provide funds for pediatric cancer patients, toys for Marines and Sailors at Camp Pendleton, food for those in need and much more.

The importance of being a member of the PTA can't be overstated. The fund have provided such things as much needed supplies for classrooms, emergency radios, a sound system, a digital marquee, and the list is endless. PTA volunteers work tirelessly to provide enrichment activities and experiences. If you are a PTA member, thank you. If you haven't joined yet, it is never too late.

Our next issue is April 10.

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Educational Services

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



Liza Zielasko
Assistant
Superintendent

Math Leadership Summit

Saddleback Valley Unified School District's Educational Services department recently hosted a Math Education Leadership Summit for math educators across southern California. In addition to the math leaders that drove in from other school districts, about 50 of our own principals, instructional coaches, and District administrators came together in our District Board Room.

Kevin Dykema, the president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and co-author of *Productive Math Struggle: A Six-Point Action Plan for Fostering Perseverance*, spoke to the math leaders on how to shift from math focused on memorizing to math focused on students truly understanding. Participants left the math leadership event feeling confident in supporting teachers in provoking productive struggle. They brought back knowledge of how to guide teachers through valuing productive struggle, fostering math identity, building

community, planning for struggle, supporting struggle, and reflecting on productive struggle. This event, sponsored by Hand2Mind, was successful in inspiring the best possible math education for our SVUSD students!



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How Valentine's Day Celebrations Impact Children's Emotional Well-being

and the Importance of Nurturing Healthy Relationships from an Early Age

Valentine's Day, often synonymous with romantic love, can have an impact on children's emotional well-being and lays the foundation for nurturing healthy relationships from an early age. Beyond the exchange of age-appropriate romantic settlements, this day can serve as an additional learning moment for guiding children in understanding diverse forms of love, affection, attention, and building meaningful connections.

Children absorb lessons about love and relationships from their surroundings, and Valentine's Day can be a practical form for parents to model healthy behaviors. By engaging in activities that promote kindness such as crafting cards for friends or expressing appreciation, parents show their children the significance of fostering supportive and caring relationships, thinking about others, sharing kind words and meaningful gifts, and generally showing kindness without the need to spend money, necessarily.

Conversations centered on emotions, respect and effective communication become integral on this day as they should any other day. These discussions should be at a child's developmental level and appropriate regarding home and cultural values, emotional expression, healthy boundaries and understanding effective communication.

Early exposure to varied and appropriate forms of love cultivate emotional intelligence and resilience in children. It is essential for parents to ensure inclusivity acknowledging that not all children experience familial or romantic love similarly. Encouraging empathy toward diverse experiences and cultures fosters an environment of acceptance and understanding.

It is important to ensure children understand and value meaningful relationships, fostering compassionate and nurturing consideration for others.

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Athena, Age 2



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Human Resources

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



Dr. Darvin Jackson
Assistant
Superintendent

The HR Department have Two Foci for the Spring:

- Ramping up for the upcoming hiring season;
 - Providing exceptional ongoing benefits, while attempting to mitigate rising healthcare costs for the 2025 benefits cycle.
- In an effort to attract qualified and diverse candidates for certificated positions,

Dr. Kimble and Dr. Jackson will attend the following university career fairs:

- University of Southern California on February 23, 2024
- Concordia University on March 8, 2024
- Cal State Dominguez Hills on March 13, 2024
- Cal State Long Beach on March 11, 2024
- Cal State Fullerton on March 19, 2024

At the conclusion of the career fair visits, on March 23, 2024 Saddleback Valley Unified School District will host the annual Super Saturday hiring event where we will invite prospective candidates to the district office.

Business Services

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



Robert Craven
Assistant
Superintendent

Student Transportation Plan

Saddleback Valley Unified School District is currently soliciting public input on the proposed Student Transportation Plan for the 2024-2025 school year. The Plan is designed to provide safe and consistent transportation services for our families with a specific emphasis on our primary and special needs students. The State provides reimbursement funding for school districts based on the prior year eligible

transportation expenditures and prior year Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) transportation related add-on funding. The plan describes the transportation services for pupils in transitional kindergarten to 6th grade, and pupils who are low income. The survey can be found on the District website at www.svusd.org/departments/business-services/transportation.

At Robinson Ranch Elementary School, the new kinder playground is complete. This fully accessible play area is truly special and will be a fabulous addition to the school and district.





The United States Youth Volleyball League's mission is to provide every child between the ages of 7 and 15 a chance to learn and play volleyball

in a fun, safe, supervised environment. One of the main tenets of the program is to encourage children to do their best with their abilities. With an emphasis on positive reinforcement, the program seeks to build confidence and self-esteem in each child.

USYVL was founded in 1997 in Southern California with 139 players. Today that number has grown to more than 15,000 players annually, nationwide. This phenomenal growth reflects USYVL's commitment to a healthy competitive sports atmosphere and the development of responsible individuals. Several of our USYVL participants have advanced on to play at the NCAA level.

What makes USYVL tick?

USYVL was founded on community involvement and support. Volunteer staff members are instructed on the best way to organize their site. The foundation of USYVL is the "Site" or basic community program. Each Site is headed by a Site Director who conducts the framework of USYVL's philosophies, rules, regulations, and bylaws.

Everyone Helps Out — USYVL is a volunteer organization with more than 5,000 parents, many of them working as coaches, assistant coaches or administrators. It's not unusual to find two, three, or more children in the same family playing at a USYVL site while Mom and Dad serve as coach and assistant coach. USYVL can be a total family experience!

What will your child get out of USYVL? While the program teaches children the skills necessary to excel in the sport of volleyball, the focus remains on participation, cooperation, sportsmanship, responsibility and, of course, fun!

Action — Strength, endurance and improved coordination result from the weekly activity of the program. Furthermore, a season of league games is sure to provide plenty of exciting volleyball action.

Skills — Skills are taught using technically correct methods for peak performance and safety.

Teamwork — The USYVL is a family-oriented program where parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends are strongly encouraged to become involved. Parents and volunteers assist with coaching, registration, check-in and equipment set-up.

EVERY CHILD PLAYS • USYVL.ORG



Mission Viejo at Granada Park

Thursday, April 11, 2024 - Saturday, June 1, 2024

Thursdays: 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

& Saturdays: 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM

Aliso Viejo at Acorn Park

Wednesday, April 10, 2024 - Saturday, June 1, 2024

Wednesdays: 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

& Saturdays: 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM



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Cielo Vista *Elementary School*

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



**Dr. Frances
Hansell**
Principal

Hawk Hangout – All are Welcome!

SV Connects is alive and well at Cielo Vista as we offer an alternate recess student choice in our Hawk Hangout. Under the facilitation and guidance of Counselor Jennie Chavez and Speech teacher Diana Montoya, students are able to choose indoor activities designed to promote mindfulness and friendship. Cross-age buddies can build on a vertical Lego wall, play board games or complete “about me” activities as shown in the photo. Students enjoy Mindfulness Tuesdays with an opportunity to draw and color ways they can calm down and problem solve. All these activities are designed to develop students’ abilities to work through conflicts, and empathize with one another. This helps to build confidence and good citizens. We are proud to prioritize student choice and positive social-emotional behaviors. Go Hawks!



Counselor Jennie

de Portola *Elementary School*

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



Brendon Morrow
Principal

Welcome Mrs. Kimberly Smith

Meet Mrs. Kimberly Smith. She teaches 2nd grade at de Portola and was recently recognized by SVUSD as de Portola’s Teacher of the Year. She is known to be a friendly, hospitable, and caring teacher by both her students and her fellow staff members. Mrs. Smith performs numerous responsibilities outside her classroom, which impact countless other students and teachers as well. This includes being a teacher liaison for all things library-related, serving as the SVEA Site Union Rep, and for mentoring student teachers from various universities. Mrs. Smith has taught at our school for 18 years and in our district for 27 years. Beyond supporting her students and fellow staff members, Mrs. Smith enjoys time with her family, trips to the local mountains, and birdwatching where ever she can. Students, teachers, and our staff all believe we are lucky to have teachers like Mrs. Smith at de Portola!



Del Cerro *Elementary School*

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



Dawn Lam
Principal

DC Dolphins Doing Dazzling Deeds

During the month of December, students in grades 4th through 6th designed and created their own carnival games during lunch under the supervision of 6th grade teacher, Jean Cavanaugh. On Wednesday, January 10, the school hosted the Carnival for all of our Dolphins. Each student was given five raffle tickets to play games, but had the ability to purchase additional as a fundraiser. At the close of the Carnival, our students earned \$850 to donate to the charity of their choice. A survey was sent to all students to vote for the charity, which encouraged student voice. The donation will be presented to the Mission Viejo Animal Services at an upcoming Walk n' Talk. We are so proud of our Dolphins, doing dazzling deeds to help build empathy and self-efficacy.



Del Lago *Elementary School*

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



Jonathan Kaplan
Principal

Superstar Library/Media Clerk at Del Lago

Del Lago Elementary has an incredible library/media clerk! She is Shannon Woest and she was honored in the November 2023 issue of Parenting OC magazine. Our students know her as the go-to person to find the latest reading materials for any grade level and any genre. She is patient, always kind, and inclusive in how she works with all students and with all teachers. We have known Mrs. Woest's incredible skills since 2017, but sometimes it takes a nomination from a parent volunteer to really showcase our school's and district's best. Huge thanks to Mrs. Kim for sharing Mrs. Woest's abilities with Parenting OC magazine! Our students not only get the best instruction from our teachers, but also from our support staff, and in particular the truly gifted Mrs. Woest!



El Toro High School

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



Dr. James Martin
Principal

ETHS MUN is FUN!

Model United Nations is a simulation of the famed international organization, the United Nations. Students from around the nation represent different countries and debate world issues against schools from all over the world.

At ETHS, MUN provides an invaluable experience that helps to expand a student's sphere of knowledge and develop an understanding of different cultures and prevalent issues across the globe. It provides valuable skills required to thrive in our ever-changing and globally dependent world, including research, compromise, problem-solving and public speaking abilities.

This year ETHS will attend seven conferences, one at UC Berkeley, and host two conferences. ETHS MUN has already won numerous awards. Last weekend, ETHS MUN won fourteen awards including two Best Delegate Awards (the highest award possible) for Letasha Lam and Dakota Danaher! ETHS MUN also raises money for world charities, and donated last year to the World Central Kitchen and the Malala Fund.



Esperanza Special Education

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



Raymund Bueche
Principal

First Annual Holiday Fair

The Esperanza Education Center's First Annual Holiday Fair, held on December 20, 2023, showcased its students' entrepreneurial spirit. This event celebrated and highlighted the remarkable initiatives of students from ATP's various businesses with support from the SVUSD Leadership team.

Student run businesses included Jones Dog Bones, a student-run venture, presented an array of handcrafted dog treats; Hope Café, always a crowd favorite, served delicious coffee, demonstrating hospitality skills; Healthy Harvest offered ready-to-bake jars, wreaths, and snacks; Fine Design displayed exquisite handmade crafts and decorations; Bunyan's Bakery sold its mouth-watering baked goods.

The Holiday Fair provided a platform for students to display their

skills and products and fostered a sense of community and celebration. It was another avenue to present the mission to empower students through practical, hands-on business experience, enhancing their future career prospects while enriching the local community.



Foothill Ranch *Elementary School*

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



Christina Stevenson
Principal

Thank You PTA

PTA works hand in hand with the school to provide enrichment opportunities for our students, support classroom teachers, and build community with our families. They have provided funds for the library, MPR, classrooms, staff lounge, front office, and STEAM labs. Most recently, the PTA purchased the digital marquee in front of our school, emergency radios for all classrooms, and a new sound system. Volunteers are

an essential part of our daily life. They work many hours to provide fun experiences like Family Heritage Night, Science Showcase, Scholastic Book Fair, Fun Fest, and more. Thanks to our volunteer coaches, Kids Run OC is coming to FRE this spring!

Not only has the PTA membership grown from 336 members last year to 635 this year, every single teacher has been a PTA member over the past few years! We are grateful for every one of our PTA board members, members, and volunteers for their commitment, volunteerism, and dedication.



Gates *Dual Language Immersion Elementary School*

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



Diana Clearwater
Principal

Congratulations Mrs. Fung!

Gates Dual Language Immersion Elementary School is proud to celebrate Jacqueline Fung as Teacher of the Year! Mrs. Fung's 6th grade students are so fortunate to be members of such an incredible classroom community. Mrs. Fung holds high standards and prides herself on preparing her students to be successful in middle school and beyond. As part of the Gates Teacher Leadership team, she is passionate about our cultural proficiency work to support staff, students and our community in celebrating the diversity that contributes to our global society. Finally, not only is she a Gates teacher, she is the proud parent of three children who are part of the SVUSD Dual Language Immersion program; two are awesome Gator students and one is a Los Alisos Lobo. We are so fortunate to have Jacqueline Fung as part of our Gator family!



Glen Yermo *Elementary School*

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



Jennifer Televik
Principal

Atten-Dance Matters

One of our areas of focus at Glen Yermo this year is promoting regular school attendance. We know that students have the best opportunity to learn when they are at school on time every day. Our students show that they are excited to come to school each day, and we have been finding new and fun ways to celebrate them.

We started off our school year with a 20-Day Attendance Challenge, where we recognized students for coming to school every day for the first month, setting up positive habits for the year ahead. Heading into the winter recess, we hosted an Attendance Countdown with a schoolwide “Atten-dance” dance party for every day that we met our attendance goal. Add in monthly grade level attendance competitions, and we have had a lot of opportunities to celebrate the benefits of coming to school each day!



La Madera *Elementary School*

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



Jennifer Gass
Principal

Sowing Seeds of Learning

Thanks to our dedicated PTA volunteers, La Madera has established a schoolwide garden. The project began when PTA volunteer, Lisa Masukawa, proposed the idea to turn an unused corner of the school grounds into a thriving garden. This idea quickly blossomed into a

project that involves our entire school community.

Our PTA volunteers came together to design a set of raised beds for each grade level. The garden serves as an outdoor classroom where students, teachers and parents come together to plant, nurture and harvest their crops. Students enjoy the hands-on experience which incorporates math, science and language arts lessons, including writing about the garden experience. Students also enjoy tasting the vegetables they have grown in the garden!

We are so thankful to the dedication of our PTA volunteers. The schoolwide garden demonstrates the power of community-driven initiatives and the positive impact they have on education.





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La Paz *Intermediate School*

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



Tiffany Harville
Principal

Better Together

“Better Together” continues to positively impact our school culture at La Paz through our partnerships with the Philharmonic Society of Orange County and Disney’s Imagination Campus. La Paz was the recipient of a Strike Up the Band grant from the Philharmonic Society of Orange County. This partnership

allowed us to purchase a much-needed new French Horn that made its debut at our Winter Concert performance. Our music program partners with Disney’s Imagination Campus, where band and orchestra students have the opportunity to build their skills in music workshops and connect to the world of professional musicians. At La Paz we pride ourselves on exposing our students to opportunities to help them maximize their full potential. Partnerships encourage our students to not wait, but create opportunities for themselves. Our collaboration really illustrates the power of organizations working together and shows that we are “Better Together.”



La Tierra *Early Childhood Center*

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



Emily Arias
Principal

Ducklings at La Tierra

Preschool and TK students at La Tierra were able to study newly hatched, three-day-old ducklings. In preparation for the two-day visit from the ducklings, each class read stories and learned about various aspects of ducks. Students learned how long the baby ducks are in the eggs

before hatching, what they eat, and the parts of the duck. They worked on new vocabulary, such as incubation. Students enjoyed touching, holding and watching the ducklings during the school day. Each of the 20 classes were given a time slot to visit the ducklings over the two days. The students were absolutely delighted to be able to connect what they had learned in class to this hands-on experience. We are thankful for our wonderful instructional assistant, Anne-Marie Verstegen, for bringing in her ducklings as soon as they hatched. It was a wonderful learning experience for the students at La Tierra.



Mrs. Gillespie holds a baby duckling while one of the students feels the duckling’s feathers.

Laguna Hills *High School*

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



Bill Hinds
Principal

Incoming 9th Grade Showcase

The Hawks welcomed future students to The Nest on Thursday, January 11th, for our annual Incoming 9th Grade Showcase! The aux gym was loud as families chatted with athletic coaches and program advisors about opportunities offered at LHHS. Drum line then ushered families into the main gym where our administrative team gave a presentation

outlining our philosophy of supporting our students academically while giving them opportunities to explore their interests through extra-curricular activities. The event concluded with an open house where families could visit our elective classrooms including art, ceramics, culinary, auto, and graphic design. Families also viewed performances from pep squad, drama, instrumental music, and choir. The event was a huge success and we cannot wait to officially welcome our new Hawks to The Nest in the fall!



Lake Forest *Elementary School*

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



Caryn McGrew
Principal

Celebrating A Decade of Outstanding Teaching!

Join us in congratulating Britni Hart, our exceptional 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year! As one of our esteemed Education Specialists, Britni has dedicated herself to serving our school community, leaving an

indelible mark on the lives of our students and staff.

Mrs. Hart is passionate about supporting all students and has always had a deep desire to assist struggling learners and witness their success. Recognizing the



immense fulfillment that comes from supporting students through their educational journey, this passion has been a driving force behind her dedication to the field of education.

We are immensely grateful to have Britni as a valued member of our staff. Her commitment and ability to set high, yet achievable expectations for her students, has had a profound impact on their success. Mrs. Hart is a shining example of excellence in teaching and we are so thankful to have her on our Lake Forest Team!

Linda Vista *IB Magnet Elementary School*

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



Dr. Shannon Wyatt
Principal

Spelling Bee

In the vibrant halls of Linda Vista IB Magnet Elementary School, excitement and anticipation filled the air as students and teachers gathered to witness the culmination of weeks of hard work and dedication - the school-wide spelling

bee. This year's spelling bee brought together a diverse group of students, first through sixth grade, armed with an arsenal of words and a determination to emerge victorious. The tension was palpable as the spellers took their place in front of the judges, ready to face the challenge of spelling words from a word list provided by the Scripps National Spelling Bee competition.



Congratulations to the following grade level winners. From left to right, bottom row, 2nd grade champion Legacy Gomez, 3rd grade champion Ellie Schneider, 1st grade champion Juan Pablo Gaitan Moreno, 5th grade champion Jared Dayrit. Back row. 6th grade champion Nyx Nequinto, 4th grade champion Aaliyah Udonkuku, 6th grade runners up Aurora Tombleson and Tori Huerta.

Lomarena *Elementary School*

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



Grace Cruikshank
Principal

A Strong Sense of Belonging

Lomarena is truly a welcoming, and loving community, filled with passionate educators and staff, generous and talented community members, and students that have a strong sense of belonging and respect for each other. This year, we have the pleasure of celebrating a cherished member of our staff as

the Lomarena Teacher of Recognition for the Year, Sydney Ross! Sydney is a joyful teacher, who is always looking for new ways to engage her students, and help them reach their highest potentials. She not only shares her talents with her students, but the students of the entire school. Ms. Ross leads our efforts in developing students' character qualities in the areas of Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, Diligence, and Empathy. Sydney lives out and represents all of the values we cherish at our school. We are truly grateful for her contributions to our Lomarena Lion pride!



Los Alisos *Intermediate School*

25171 Los Lobos Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/830-9700 • www.svUSD.org/losalisos



Michael Marzilli
Principal

Esports Club

The Los Alisos esports club is a recipient of the Generation Esports Learn and Build STEAM (LABS) Program, which supplied 25 esports labs to schools across the U.S. to help integrate esports into their schools. Not only did we receive 6 high-tech gaming computers, the students learned how to build them as well.

Prior to receiving the new computers, club members had to practice and compete at home using their own equipment. This resulted in a personal entry barrier to gaming for students without the proper equipment, and they didn't get to play. These new machines will give club members more access to the technology they need to participate. Students can all game in the same room together, and those who can't afford gaming computers can play, too. Our esports club is working to further diversity and inclusion so that interested students can join and have fun playing, even without personally owning the necessary gaming equipment.



Mission Viejo *High School*

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



Tricia Osborne
Principal

MVHS Drama Shines!

Mission Viejo High School's Drama program is recognized throughout the state for its award-winning productions. Under the leadership of Drama Teacher and Theatre Director Chris Hixson, the program continues to thrive. Mr. Hixson is a

MVHS alumnus who most notably played the role of Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* as a student himself. Mr. Hixson attended the University of Arizona where he received his Bachelor's Degree in Musical Theatre and pursued a professional performing career in NYC before becoming a teacher. At the 20th Role About Theatre Festival in the fall and recently California Educational Theatre Association (CETA) Festival, Diablo students won numerous awards and medallions for the classic play *The Miracle Worker*. Classes are offered for Drama

1, Drama 3, Drama HL1 and HL2, and Play and Musical Production. Please Join us this spring for the musical *Anything Goes* which runs April 18-27, 2024. Go Diablos!



Melinda Heights *Elementary School*

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



Kathryn Martin
Principal

Students Learn Generosity

At Melinda Heights, we have the privilege and responsibility of preparing students for the future. Students have the honor of supporting our community by giving back at every opportunity. Melinda Staff, Melinda Elementary Leadership Team (MELT), our incredible PTA, and other exciting campus groups model leadership and philanthropy.

Through classrooms and campus organizations, our students learn empathy,

compassion, and generosity. In December, families donated hundreds of toys to our Marines and Sailors at Camp Pendleton. To honor our teachers and families battling cancer, Melinda Heights sponsored “Hats On Day,” raising funds for pediatric cancer patients. Our annual Jessie Rees Foundation Joy Jar drive will bring in toys and goodies to encourage children battling cancer to “Never Ever Give Up!”

The Melinda Heights Family is honored to continue to empower our students with responsibility, engage their compassion, and offer them the chance to impact the lives of others.



Montevideo *Elementary School*

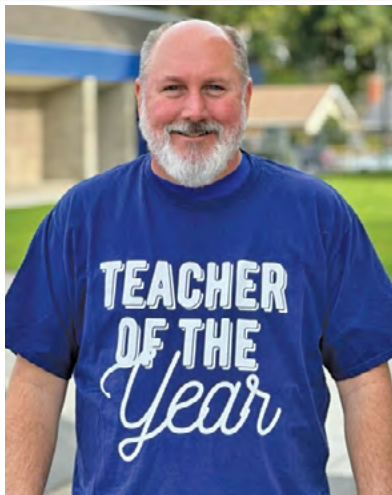
24071 Carrillo Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691 • 949/586-8050 • www.svusd.org/montevideo



Lisa Graham
Principal

Montevideo's Teacher of the Year

Montevideo is proud to honor Jason Bussinger as our Teacher of the Year. Mr. Bussinger's colleagues have all used the same words to describe him: loved, respected, hardworking and fun! He is an empathetic and patient teacher and student advocate! He specializes in helping his students with autism to gain responsibility and independence as they meet their learning goals. His classroom colleagues



love working with him. They greatly appreciate how he understands his students and sees their strengths... how he truly cares. We at Montevideo are blessed by Mr. Bussinger's positive energy and outlook. Not only the children, but also the parent community and staff, benefit immensely from all that he has to offer! We are proud to present him as our Teacher of the Year on the basis of his outstanding contributions to the lives of the children, as well as the adults, whose lives he touches daily.

Olivewood *Elementary School*

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



Alex Perez
Principal

Expanded Learning

The students at Olivewood Elementary are receiving a learning experience that extends beyond the traditional learning day.

The Expanded Learning Opportunities Program at Olivewood provides academic support and enrichment. After the dismissal school bell

rings, several of our students begin their second phase education. They participate in reading intervention and progress monitoring. They are given the chance to receive small group support that is tailored to their specific academic needs, as well as participate in enrichment classes. These classes consist of cartooning and performance through dance and drama. As the year progresses, other enrichment classes will be provided such as Lego engineering, chess and arts. The expanded learning opportunities

program has become a vision brought to life through the support of Soo Goda, District Coordinator of Expanded Learning, and Amy Howes, Site Coordinator at Olivewood. Our students truly reap the benefits of their support.



Portola Hills *Elementary School*

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



Ed MacNevin
Principal

Schoolwide Rewards at PHE

At PHE the PTA helps support a schoolwide PBIS store. Parents on the PTA work with the PHE teachers and staff to reward students with fun items that they can purchase with “Compass Coupons” at the PBIS store.

The parents at PTA love to help with the fun part of creating

a positive school culture for children. Some of the more exciting prizes at the PBIS store have been the experiences, such as lunch with Principal MacNevin or a fast pass for the Italian Ice line. PHE’s latest big hit was a ticket for the upcoming Glow Party! PHE’s new Explorer Rocket holds all of the tickets earned by students, and the entire school receives a reward when the Compass Coupons reach or exceed the horizontal gold lines. The entire PHE student body recently earned ten minutes of extra recess for their extraordinary efforts in meeting PHE’s schoolwide goals.



Rancho Cañada *Elementary School*

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



Jennifer Kajdasz
Principal

Mrs. Messano, Teacher of the Year

Rancho Cañada knows we are lucky to have someone as special as Mrs. Messano teaching in a classroom. She is one of our true gems. We were elated to find out that, not only was she honored as our school site's Teacher of the Year, she was also chosen as one of SVUSD's Teachers of the Year.

Mrs. Messano currently works as a Specialized Academic teacher for various grade levels; however, she has also made an impact to education as an intervention and elementary General Education teacher. Mrs. Messano looks at situations through the lens of an educator, parent and student. She advocates for what is best for the student always. Even after our Eagles fly the coop, she follows up with their next school (once a Mrs. Messano student, always a Mrs. Messano student). We could not be happier for her talents to be noticed and celebrated!



Mrs. Messano named SVUSD's Teacher of the Year.

Rancho Santa Margarita *Intermediate School*

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



Tyler Morgan
Principal

RSM Family Engagement

RSM and the Phoenix House have collaborated to support students and families this year. The Phoenix House offers many resources, from student counseling to family programs. Starting in October, the Phoenix House "Strengthening Families Program"

held an 8-week session with over ten family participants. Each session was a different topic, from encouraging good behavior to managing emotions. Each session included 30 minutes for families to have dinner together and an hour of explaining the topic to parents and their students in separate rooms. In the second hour, parents and students came together to discuss the session's topic and engage in exercises where both shared their thoughts and ideas. This was an opportunity to connect and communicate with their

students and to talk about topics that parents may not otherwise know how to approach. We are excited about the collaboration with the Phoenix House and the support for all students here at RSM.



Robinson *Elementary School*

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



Suzy McMasters
Principal

Clay Art is Back!

After a three-year hiatus, we are thrilled to have clay art back at Robinson Elementary! Our dedicated PTA, along with many parent volunteers have jumped back into this fun school tradition of instructing students through this creative process. Students mold and shape the clay in the first session, learn about firing their clay creations in the kiln, then return for a second session to glaze their creations. This year our scholars made something different at each grade level- handprints, snails, owls, sea creatures, monsters, mugs, cups, and a personalized rendition of our beloved mascot, Robbie Rattler, by our sixth graders! The finished products will be on display during our Robinson Showcase for families to take home. Go Rattlers!



San Joaquin *Elementary School*

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



David Shun
Principal

Connecting the Classroom to the Outdoors

San Joaquin students were excited to experience hands-on science in a whole new way at Trabuco Field Study! Our third graders were able to immerse themselves with standards aligned science activities that connect classroom learning to outdoor “field research”. Upon arriving, our 3rd graders began analyzing the weather. After participating in class discussions, they went out and used different scientific tools to measure the temperature, the amount of precipitation, and take note of wind direction all while jotting down their observations in their scientific notebooks. Then, students participated in a hands-on activity where they built an irrigation system using pipes. Next, our students observed animal features to discover the breeds of three

different chickens. Lastly, our 3rd graders participated in a nature walk through O’Neill park to observe a variety of tree species and woodpecker habitats. Science was truly brought to life through this experience!



Santiago STEAM Magnet

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



Kristin Thomsen
Principal

Significant Success

Santiago STEAM Magnet Elementary School has achieved significant success in its composting program, diverting 1000 pounds of food waste from landfills. The students' dedication to waste reduction is evident in their meticulous sorting efforts after each lunch session. By utilizing

various composting methods, including traditional pile composting, spinning bins, and worm composting, the students have wholeheartedly embraced sustainable practices. This accomplishment not only showcases the school's commitment to environmental stewardship, but also educates students on the importance of waste management. Santiago STEAM Magnet Elementary School serves as a prime example of how small actions, when multiplied, can have a substantial impact on creating a more eco-friendly and sustainable future.

The school's composting program is part of the second and fifth-grade Project Based Learning (PBL) project. Students in special education classes manage the day-to-day operations of the composting program, and the school collects compost materials from a variety of sources.

	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	WEEKLY TOTAL
UPPER	6	21	25	20	28	100
LOWER	12	17	11	24	16	80
TOTALS	18	38	36	44	44	180

Serrano Intermediate School

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



Jordan Reed
Principal

The Recycled Orchestra

Sra. Brittany Sola's Spanish 1 students learned about The Recycled Orchestra, also known as the Landfill Harmonic, a group of kids from Cateura, Paraguay who play music using instruments made from recycled materials. They live in a very poor area and search through the trash to find things they can sell in

order to make enough money to live. The orchestra was started by Favio Chavez, an environmental engineer who wanted to teach the children music. At first, they didn't have enough instruments, so a carpenter named Nicolas Gomez made new ones using things from the landfill. The Recycled Orchestra teaches us that with creativity and determination, we can make positive changes in our community. Serrano students created their own recycled instruments and learned traditional holiday carols sung in Spanish speaking countries around the world. They combined the idea of recycled instruments with the carols and prepared a show for teachers and staff.



Silverado High School

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



David Gordon
Principal

ASB Events!

The Eagles successfully SOARed through 2023. We ended our year with some great ASB events like Disney Day, Ugly Sweater Day and celebrated

December Birthdays. ASB also hosted our annual holiday door decorating competition and holiday cookie decorating. With the help of the Mission Viejo Police Foundation, we hosted our 2nd annual Gifts of Hope event. Over 90 students were randomly selected to “buy” holiday gifts for family, friends and loved ones. Mission Viejo Deputies were on hand to help students wrap their chosen gifts. This led us into our final Student Marketplace of 2023 which included clothes, toys, food and household items.



SVUSD Virtual Academy K-12

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



Glenn Giokaris
Principal

Students Chart Their Own Course

An important goal of the SVUSD Virtual Academy is to empower students to “Chart Their Own Course.” Technology and online learning tools allow students to access classes, collaborate with peers, complete coursework on their terms, and design their educational experience according to their individual goals and aspirations.

This guiding philosophy extends beyond academics. By providing both academic flexibility and support, SVA teachers empower students to explore and pursue their passions outside of school. This flexibility allows them to lead balanced lives, engage in higher education, work,



travel, and pursue their personal interests. Whether it is completing a year of college before you finish high school, participating in an internship, playing a club sport, or living a more balanced life, “Chart Your Own Course” is a call for students to explore the possibilities and navigate their unique journey.

Trabuco Elementary School

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



Dr. Lindsey Gatfield
Principal

Award Ceremony

Trabuco Elementary School believes that the foundation of positive behavior focuses on establishing and communicating clear expectations for students. When students are made aware of these expectations, they are better able to make decisions that are safe, kind, and respectful. At Trabuco, the coyote mascot is tied

into this through its HOWL; Trabuco Coyotes are expected to Have respect, Own their actions, Work together, and Lead with kindness.

Four times a year, students who exemplify one of the HOWL expectations are recognized in an award ceremony. Classroom teachers stand on stage to say something special and meaningful to each of their award recipients. Their family members are invited to join the ceremony, and all of the award recipients are cheered on by their peers. Trabuco Elementary always looks forward to celebrating these students who truly make their school a better place.



Trabuco Hills High School

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



Alicia Foulk
Principal

2023 THHS Holiday Toy Drive Highlights

This year, the THHS ASB hosted a holiday toy drive to support local families in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District.

They coordinated a toy drive, collecting new unwrapped toys for children ages 5-10 years old. In

their collection efforts, the THHS ASB rallied the student body of Trabuco Hills High School to donate to this cause. The students of Trabuco Hills High School collectively gathered over 480 toys to donate. In addition to the three weeks of toy collection, the THHS ASB also hosted their first annual "Tip a Mustang" program, performing services like t-shirt delivery and gift wrapping for the staff of Trabuco Hills High School. They raised

a total of \$400 to donate for the purchase of gifts for older students in need within the district. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to help the community and provide for others this holiday season!



Trabuco Mesa *Elementary School*

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



**Dr. Kristan
Bruce**
Principal

Top Dog Paws

MTSS/SEB is going strong at Trabuco Mesa! Students work hard every day to show that they are respectful, responsible, and safe. This earns them our Top Dog Paws tickets which they can use to shop in our Top Dog Paw Store. There are many rewards

to choose from, but the most popular ones are the experience rewards! Some of these include Lunch with the Principal, Morning Announcement Helper, and a Movie Party. Students are so excited to earn these fun activities and work hard to save up their Paws. Our Student Store is a huge success in large part to our wonderful parent volunteers who show

up consistently to make this the best experience possible for our students. They show up every month to set up, take down, and inventory - but most importantly, spend time with our students and help guide them through the store. It is definitely a highlight for our students. Go Bulldogs!



Valencia *Elementary School*

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



Carolyn Fries
Principal

Festival of Cultures

On January 21st, the Laguna Hills Community Center played host to the Festival of Cultures. The event was a celebration of diverse cultures, with over 30 Valencia families representing sixteen different countries through their respective booths. The booths provided attendees with an opportunity to experience and

appreciate cultures through displays, dance, music, arts, food, and various fun activities. The event featured special live performances, including OCO Kibou Taiko which performs to preserve the art of Japanese taiko drumming, Southern Wind Lion Dancers which has been part of East Asian culture for thousands of years, and our Valencia students performing a Bhangra Dance which is a type of traditional folk dance of Punjab area of the Indian subcontinent. The Festival of Cultures proved to be a resounding success, providing an opportunity for attendees to immerse themselves in multicultural activities and an opportunity to foster cultural exchange and appreciation.



Whole Health Everyday 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: SchoolNewsKay@gmail.com (Please put Saddleback Valley in the subject line)

Entries must be received by **March 31, 2024**

From the correct entries one name will be drawn to win a \$20 gift certificate redeemable at Barnes & Noble.

Thank you Barkate / Nehi Orthodontics
for sponsoring our contests
www.BarkateNehiSmiles.com

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| ALKALINE | MINERALS |
| ALMONDS | NATURAL |
| APPLES | NOURISH |
| CARROTS | NUTS |
| CHICKEN | PROTEIN |
| FIBER | SALMON |
| FRUITS | SEEDS |
| HEALTH | VEGETABLES |
| HUMMUS | VITAMINS |
| KALE | WATER |
| LEMONS | |



Good Dental Health 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: SchoolNewsKay@gmail.com (Please put Saddleback Valley in the subject line)

Entries must be received by **March 15, 2024**.

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



Thank you Barkate / Nehi Orthodontics
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- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Breads | Eggs | Milk |
| Brushing | Examination | Nutrition |
| Cereals | Fish | Orthodontist |
| Checkup | Flossing | Pediatric |
| Daily | Fluoride | Sugar |
| Dairy | Fruits | Tooth |
| Dentist | Guidelines | Vegetables |
| Development | Healthy | Water |
| Diet | Meat | Whole grains |



Congratulations to Contest Winners: Austin Knihtila and Theodore Boswell

Orange County Department of Education

200 Kalmus Drive, Costa Mesa CA 92628 • 714/966-4000 • www.ocde.us



Dr. Al Mijares
Superintendent



Dr. Ramon Miramontes
Deputy Superintendent of Instructional Programs

Here's a common question we hear: Why are you called the Orange County Department of Education when other county offices of education across California are known as, well, county offices of education? The answer takes us back to a decision

made under the leadership of Dr. Robert Peterson, who served as county superintendent from 1966 through 1991. Early in his tenure, Dr. Peterson proposed changing the name of the then-Orange County Schools Office to the Orange County Department of Education, saying it was more in line with other county departments.

It was also reflective of the organization's expanding role. Our office had evolved into an agency that coordinated academic programs and provided technical and special services to all school districts, according to a resolution. The change was approved in March 1969.

This spirit of evolution and adaptation has been the hallmark of the Orange County Department of Education since its inception almost exactly 135 years ago.

On March 11, 1889, California Gov. Robert Waterman signed a bill that led to the formation of Orange County — and the office that would become OCDE. An annual report from 1890 documented a combined enrollment of 3,426 students, served by a total of 34 districts — though some operated less than six months out of the year. Total annual expenditures for the entire county were less than \$65,000.

Fast forward to today. Under the leadership of current County Superintendent Dr. Al Mijares, our department now supports nearly half a million students and approximately 600 schools as a cornerstone of Orange County's educational community.

Our role is multifaceted, yet it can be understood through two primary functions:

First, we provide direct instruction to our county's most vulnerable student populations through our Alternative Education and Special Education divisions, the latter of which includes our newly rebranded "Connections" schools.

Second, OCDE offers a comprehensive suite of services to local school districts. These range from meaningful training opportunities and high-speed internet access to legal and fiscal guidance, payroll systems, Local Control and Accountability Plan assistance and approval, student enrichment and much more.

When districts face hurdles in meeting specific performance goals on the California School Dashboard, OCDE and other county offices of education are also called upon to provide targeted support. This process, known as differentiated assistance, complements districts' own efforts to ensure that students' needs are met.

As we continue to grow and adapt, it's important to underscore that OCDE's core principles have remained unchanged. Driven by a commitment to empower all learners, we approach our roles not merely as administrators of the Orange County Department of Education but as stewards of a legacy of service and continuous improvement that dates back over a century.

Change is more than a chapter in our history. It is the very essence of our DNA. And it will be the engine that propels us forward, fueling our journey toward a brighter, more innovative and prosperous Orange County.