

School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation

Covering the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District



Volume 17, Issue 49

February 2025

Three PYLUSD Middle Schools Awarded as California Schools to Watch



Celebrating Excellence in Education, Teamwork, and Student Success

www.SchoolNewsRollCall.com



FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



MAR 9



MAR 20 & 21



MAR 23



APR 6



JUNE 6-29

ON SALE NOW!

LA MIRADA THEATRE
www.LaMiradaTheatre.com

Board of Education



Marilyn Anderson
Trustee



Carrie Buck
Vice-President



Todd Frazier
Clerk



Tricia Quintero
Trustee



Leandra Blades
Trustee

2024 California Schools to Watch



Renee Gray
Acting Superintendent

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District (PYLUSD) is proud to announce that three of its middle schools—Orange County School of Computer Science (OCSCS), Tuffree Middle School, and Yorba Linda Middle School (YLMS)—have

been recognized as 2024 California Schools to Watch by the California League of Schools. This prestigious distinction celebrates schools that exemplify outstanding teamwork, innovation, and consistently high levels of student achievement.

This year marks the first re-designation for both OCSCS and Tuffree Middle School and the third for Yorba Linda Middle School, underscoring their commitment to sustained excellence.

OCSCS Principal Dr. Beth Fisher shared her pride in the school's recognition, noting a particularly meaningful moment during the school's evaluation: "The Director of the California League of Educators honored our school as 'a model school to all model schools.' This recognition is a testament to the incredible efforts of our students and staff." During the student panel, OCSCS students described their school as "putting us on the leaderboard," "the best," "first," and even "a fantasy." Dr. Fisher added, "It is truly a dream realized to see our school become a real-life fantasy for our students and community."



At Tuffree Middle School, Principal Sarah Barton attributed the school's success to the creativity, collaboration, and unwavering dedication of her staff. "Our team believes every child deserves a supportive network of caring adults," she shared. "Their work is guided by the belief that what they do today will positively shape the future. The staff at Tuffree exemplify excellence in every sense." She commended her team for fostering a nurturing and dynamic learning environment that prioritizes student success.

Yorba Linda Middle School Principal Paige Stills reflected on the critical factors behind her school's achievements, highlighting the importance of campus culture and aligned instructional practices. "Our lessons are purposeful and driven by clear learning targets. Students engage in structured collaboration within small groups and are offered opportunities to demonstrate their learning in meaningful ways," she explained. Stills also emphasized the vital role of the school's Professional Learning Community in fostering a culture of continuous improvement and positive outcomes.

The California Schools to Watch District Leadership Celebration will take place in March, offering a moment to honor these remarkable schools and the dedicated educators who inspire student success across the district.

R.E.A.C.H. Foundation

21520 Yorba Linda Blvd., Suite G503, Yorba Linda, CA 92887 • 714/323-9706 • www.reach4pylud.org



Giselle Nguyen
President

REACH Foundation Educator Grants: Empowering Innovation in PYLUSD Classrooms

The REACH Foundation is thrilled to announce the 2024 Educator Grant recipients, receiving \$20,000 in funding to support creative and impactful projects that enrich learning for students across Placentia-Yorba Linda

Unified School District (PYLUSD). This year, we received an outstanding array of applications from dedicated educators eager to enhance their classrooms and inspire their students.

From a transilluminator that allows students to view DNA fragments to art supplies to innovative STEM programs and creative teaching tools, these grants provide resources that empower teachers to think boldly and nurture student growth. With a focus on innovation, creativity, and sustainable impact, the REACH

Foundation is proud to invest in ideas that align with our mission to engage students through Academics, Arts, and Athletics.

The grant recipients were honored at the From the Inside Speaker Series on January 10th. We extend our gratitude to all educators who applied and look forward to seeing these projects come to life in PYLUSD classrooms!



History Depot



Learn about
World History • US History
Videos • Art • Music
Study Habits

History is about learning and understanding the past. The past does not change, but interpretations do. One cannot erase history and expect to remember the past.



HistoryDepot.com

Biology. Kids. Hands-on. Fun

Spring and Summer Registration OPEN!

After School. In-class. Home school. Camps. Parties. Private event. Girl Scouts. Parent & Me program.

Bionerds®
(949) 288-1486 Hello@bionerdsllc.com
www.BionerdsLLC.com

560 W. 1st Street, Ste. 2, Tustin, CA 92780

School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation

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

CONTENT COORDINATOR: Barbra Longiny

GRAPHIC DESIGNER/PRODUCTION: Emily Ung and Mie Kawamura

COPY EDITORS: Kate Karp, Anna Zappia **SOCIAL MEDIA:** Nancy Lueder

SCHOOL NEWS ROLL CALL, LLC
P.O. Box 728, Seal Beach, CA 90740 • 562/493-3193
www.schoolnewsrollcall.com Copyright © 2006, School News Roll Call, LLC

Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited unless otherwise stated. Opinions expressed by contributing writers and guest columnists are their views and not necessarily those of *School News Roll Call*. This publication is privately owned and the right is reserved to select and edit content. The Placentia Yorba Linda Unified School District does not endorse the advertisers in this publication.

Brookhaven *Elementary School (TK-6)*

1851 N. Brookhaven Ave., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7110 • www.brookhavenelementary.com



Laura Fisher
Principal

Brookhaven Sixth Graders Explore Nature at Camp Cedar Crest

Brookhaven Elementary School's sixth-grade students embarked on an unforgettable adventure at outdoor science school from January 13-17, 2025. Camp Cedar Crest offered students an immersive educational experience focused on environmental science and outdoor skills.

Throughout the week, students engaged in hands-on activities such as meeting animals in the nature center, forest ecology hikes, and stargazing sessions led by experienced naturalists. Team-building exercises, like creating and performing skits and group challenges, helped foster collaboration and resilience among the young learners.



A brave Brookhaven student holds a slithery snake!



Ms. Landrum holding a chinchilla.

Bryant Ranch *School (TK-5)*

24695 Paseo de Toronto, Yorba Linda, CA 92887 • 714/986-7120 • www.bryantranchschool.com



Shannon Robles
Principal

Bryant Ranch Explorers Shine on Stage

At Bryant Ranch, our Explorers are given countless opportunities to showcase their talents. This year, they participated in our annual school play, *Aladdin Jr.*, where students developed vital skills in communication, social interaction, and creativity. It's inspiring to see their confidence grow as they become more comfortable performing in front of an audience. These experiences not only foster personal development but also enhance academic progress, especially in oral communication. Our second language learners, in particular, benefit from improved vocabulary and communication abilities. The season's highlight was the grand finale at El Dorado High School, where nearly 90 students from grades one through five delivered two fantastic performances that captivated the audience. This achievement wouldn't have been possible without the support of our incredible PTA and families. We are extremely proud of our Explorers and the remarkable growth they've shown through these experiences!



El Camino Real High School (Continuation High School 9-12)

1351 E. Orangethorpe Ave., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7060 • www.ecrhs.pylusd.org



Gina Aguilar
Principal

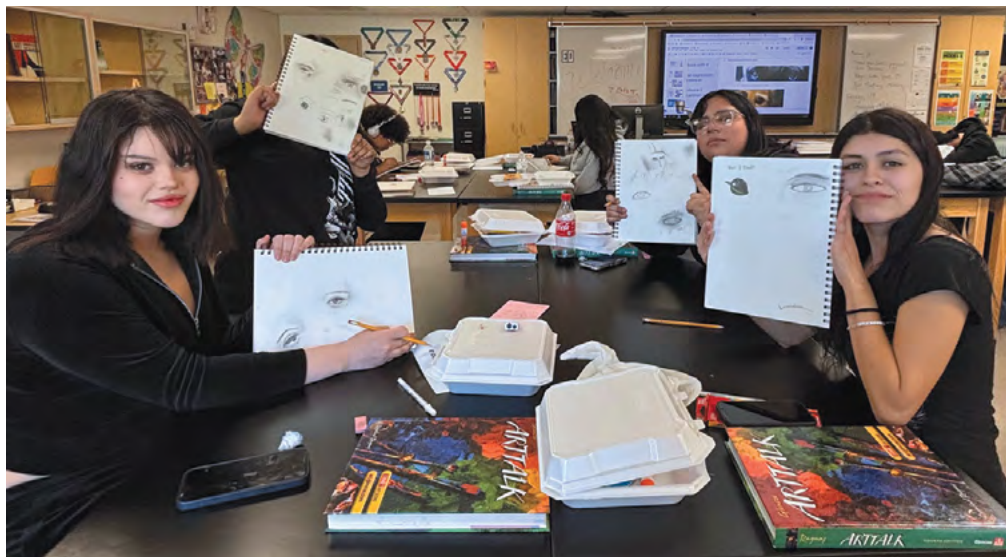
New Creative Opportunities for El Camino Students

At El Camino Real High School, we aim to provide opportunities for students to explore a variety of content areas that foster college and career readiness while encouraging creativity and innovation. This semester

two additional elective courses have been added

for that purpose. A new course in Art Fundamentals provides hands-on projects where students explore a variety of artistic techniques, materials, and styles, developing their creative skills and visual awareness. A second elective, Multimedia Journalism focuses on how to research, write, and produce news stories across various platforms, including print, digital, audio, and video. Activities include creating weekly video announcements

for the school and developing a podcast that will focus on topics of interest for students. In addition, Multimedia Journalism students are collaborating with their peers in our Digital Design academy to create a quarterly school magazine. Students are excited about these new opportunities and have expressed how the courses have also helped with their overall wellness.



El Dorado High School (9-12)

1651 N. Valencia Ave., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7580 • www.edhs.org



David Okamoto
Principal

Continuing to SET THE TONE!

Here at El Dorado High School we are continuing to "SET THE TONE!" this year! Our first semester ended this year for the first time ever before Winter Break with our finals happening the last week of class. Our students did very well. With a new semester upon on us and a continued focus in the areas of Academics, Activities, Arts, or Athletics...I am confident that we will have a successful spring semester.

Academically speaking, our honors and AP courses are preparing for spring assessments and AP exams. Our 11th graders will be taking the CAASPP and CAST assessments once AP testing concludes in May. Our ELs and students with an IEP also get the support that they need in order for them to be successful inside the classroom. Again, our arts and athletics programs have a wide variety of opportunities to get involved and become connected here at El Dorado. Our ASB students are busy planning activities for our students and anticipate a wonderful district wide Winter Formal coming up. Two words that I would use to describe my feelings often when I think about El Dorado are pride and gratitude. Both are centered on the teachers and staff

that pour into our students, reaching them where they are at, and making every effort to have them grow and become even greater both inside and outside of the classroom! Thank you for taking the time to read this article and "GO HAWKS!"



Esperanza High School (9-12)

1830 N. Kellogg Dr., Anaheim, CA 92807 • 714/986-7540 • www.esperanzahs.com



Loan Sriruksa
Principal

PBIS Gold Award

Esperanza High School is proud to announce its recognition with the prestigious Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Gold Award. This honor highlights the school's commitment to fostering a positive and supportive campus environment through the implementation of the Aztec P.R.I.D.E. program.

Aztec P.R.I.D.E.—representing being Positive, Responsible, Innovative, Determined, and Engaged—serves as the foundation for encouraging students to exhibit exemplary behavior and attitudes schoolwide. Students earn Aztec P.R.I.D.E. cards for demonstrating these values, which they can redeem for rewards such as gift items, dance tickets, and more. This initiative has fostered a culture of recognition and celebration of positive actions throughout the campus.

Additionally, the school has implemented a successful Tier 2 Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) system as part of its PBIS framework. This program provides individualized support for students needing assistance with academics, behavior, or attendance. Participating students check in twice a week with a designated adult mentor who offers



guidance and encouragement, helping them stay on track toward their goals.

Receiving the PBIS Gold Award reflects the dedication of Esperanza's staff and students in creating a welcoming, inclusive, and growth-oriented community. The school remains determined to build upon this success, aiming for even greater achievements, including the coveted PBIS Platinum Award.

Esperanza High School extends its gratitude to its staff, students, and families for their collective efforts in making Aztec P.R.I.D.E. a defining characteristic of its campus culture. Together, they will continue striving for excellence and supporting every student's journey to success.

Fairmont Elementary School (TK-6)

5241 Fairmont Blvd., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7130 • www.fairmontelementary.com



Anne San Roman
Principal

Science Comes Alive at Fairmont

Fairmont Elementary students are embracing science in exciting, hands-on ways! Thanks to the generous support of the PTA, students in 3rd through 6th grade have had the opportunity to engage in interactive workshops provided by The Discovery Cube. These sessions, hosted on campus, align with grade-level science standards and offer dynamic, hands-on activities that bring learning to life.

Third graders explored the principles of *force and motion*. Using ramps, balls, measuring tapes, and other materials, students investigated concepts such as forces, motion, inertia, and gravity in action-packed experiments.



Fourth graders delved into the world of *electricity and magnetism*. They examined electromagnetic fields and built their own electric motors to take home, bridging the connection between electricity and magnetism in a creative and memorable way.

Fifth graders tackled the challenges of *engineering design* by constructing bird nests. They tested their designs to ensure they could hold the weight of a chicken egg and examined real bird nests to learn how specific behaviors support the survival of young birds.

Sixth graders participated in a fascinating *Pig Heart Dissection* workshop. Guided by trained professionals, students dissected pig hearts, compared them to human hearts, and traced the pathway of blood through the circulatory system.

Fairmont Elementary takes pride in making learning come alive through innovative programs like these. A heartfelt thank you goes to the PTA for supporting such incredible experiences that inspire curiosity and a love for science among our students!

Rebecca Allan, Principal

A Busy December

George Key students had a busy December. The Yorba Linda Sunrise Rotary hosted their annual Holiday Party at lakeview elementary school for George Key students and staff. Santa made a visit and each student received a present. Additionally Sunrise Rotary donated \$2000.00 from their Lobster Fest fundraiser to George Key School! Sunrise Rotary has been supporting George Key school for over 40 years! Thank you Sunrise Rotary for your continued support. Looking forward, the Key Parent Student Staff Organization (PSSO) is providing the Percussive Dance Ensemble assembly for George Key students January 16th at 10 a.m. in the Golden MPR and a snow play day on February 21st. George Key is also looking forward to a Random Acts of Kindness Week in February culminating on Feb 14th with a parent student activity day! So many fun activities for our students!

The Venture Coffee Cats Coffee Cart is in full swing. Venture Academy students served coffee and treats to the Placentia Yorba Linda School Principals at their Holiday Meeting. Venture sells coffee, hot chocolate and other items to staff twice weekly. The students are responsible for taking inventory, stocking, advertising and generating

invoices for their goods. We are so proud of our Venture students who are learning job skills as they prepare to transition to the working world! Venture Choir is looking forward to their next concert, which is called The Love Concert to be held at El Dorado Performing arts Center in February. It is sure to be a fun evening filled with songs and showcasing the talents of our student and Choir Director Carmen Cointreau.



Bailey and Moises serve principals at the holiday meeting.

Glenknoll Elementary School (TK-6)

6361 Glenknoll Dr., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7140 • www.glenknoll.org



Terry Mulcahy
Principal

From Computer Lab to STEM Lab

Glenknoll Elementary School has unveiled its innovative STEM lab, providing students with hands-on opportunities to explore science, technology, engineering, and math. With a bit of help from PTA, old computer lab furniture was removed and new, movable tables and equipment were installed.

The lab's highlight is an exciting activity where students program robotic cars to navigate colorful mats. Using coding principles, students assign commands that make the cars respond to colors, performing actions like stopping, turning, or accelerating. This interactive experience helps

develop problem-solving, teamwork, and critical thinking skills while making learning fun.

The color mat activity has quickly become a favorite among students. Sixth grade student Koji Ellis said, "It's so cool to see our code in action and watch the car follow our instructions!"

Glenknoll's STEM lab is inspiring the next generation of innovators, making science and technology accessible and exciting for young learners. We LOVE our STEM lab!



Glenview Elementary School (TK-6)

1775 Glenview Ave., Anaheim, CA 92807 • 714/986-7150 • www.glenviewbulldogs.org



Viri Fraga
Principal

Glenview Elementary Embraces El Día De Los Muertos

On November 1st, 2024, Glenview Elementary hosted its first school-wide bi-cultural event, celebrating the Mexican tradition of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). Día de los Muertos, observed primarily in Mexico, is a joyful and respectful celebration that blends indigenous traditions. Rather than a somber occasion, it is a time

for families to celebrate the lives of their ancestors, offering a chance for reflection, remembrance, and connection. At Glenview, all students participated in this vibrant cultural celebration by creating “altares” or altars, which are traditional displays set up to honor and remember deceased loved ones. These altars are often decorated with marigolds, candles, photographs, and special offerings like food, drinks, and personal mementos to welcome the spirits back for the celebration. In addition, the students had the opportunity to taste traditional pastries served on this day such as Pan De Muerto (sweet bread). The event was open to the community, where parents and community members could view the grade-level altares during the school’s Trunk or Treat event, fostering an enriching experience for all attendees.



Golden Elementary School (TK-6)

740 E. Golden Ave., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7160 • www.golden.pylusd.org



Kristin McDonald
Principal

Golden Elementary Collects Thousands of Books for Fire Victims

Golden Elementary recently rallied its community to collect thousands of books for schools and families devastated by the recent fires. With many losing everything in the disaster, our students, staff, and families united to make a difference.

Thanks to the inspiring leadership of teacher Suzie Bilhartz, the school launched a massive book drive, resulting in the collection of over 50 large boxes full of books. The effort aimed to bring comfort and learning opportunities to those impacted, showcasing the power of generosity and community spirit. Our local Blue Scoop Creamery also joined in to help spread awareness and collect books.

Once the books were collected, they were transported to a bookstore in Alta Dena, which graciously stepped in to assist with organizing and storing the donations. This thoughtful partnership ensures that the books will be ready for distribution when the victims of the fires are prepared to receive them.



This incredible effort reflects the heart of the Golden Elementary community: compassion, collaboration, and a willingness to act. Golden Elementary’s book drive is a shining example of how one community can come together to make a tangible difference. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this heartfelt initiative. We are Golden!

Kraemer Middle School (7-8)

645 N. Angelina Dr., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/996-1551 • www.kraemerms.org



Matthew Callaway
Principal

6th Grade Leadership Development Day: "4 Schools, 1 Community"

In November, Kraemer Middle School proudly hosted its first-ever 6th Grade Leadership Development Day, welcoming all 6th graders from Ruby Drive, Tynes, Morse, and Van Buren elementary schools under the theme "4 Schools, 1 Community." The event

was designed to build connections, foster school spirit, and help students develop leadership skills as they prepare for middle school. Kraemer's leadership students led workshops focused on teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, encouraging participants to collaborate and grow as future leaders. Throughout the day, students took part in interactive activities that allowed them to form new friendships and gain confidence in their abilities. The event concluded with a heartfelt appreciation activity,

where students recognized and celebrated each other's strengths. This inaugural event highlighted the strong bond between Kraemer and its feeder schools, reinforcing that together, "4 Schools" truly create "1 Community."



Lakeview Elementary School (TK-5)

17510 Lakeview Ave., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7190 • www.lakeview.pylusd.org



Stephanie Given
Principal

The Lakeview Leading Lions are Now Reporting Live!

Spearheaded by Mrs. Williams, 5th grade teacher and GATE coordinator, 40 students launched our first ever Broadcasting Journalism team this winter. In addition to learning about their gifted qualities, the rebranded Leading Lions Academy is an enrichment opportunity for our

students identified into our GATE cluster program at Lakeview. The Broadcasting Journalism team is fully equipped with a green screen, video monitors, mics, booms, and a teleprompter. Students are studying the art of writing through the genres of journalism starting with research, identifying the type of script and composing the entire broadcast. News Anchors and Field Reporters have been drafting their segments on current Lakeview events, Staff Spotlights, PBIS, Sunshine Squad, and more! Students are learning the art of creating a commercial or a compelling story and get to produce segments to be shared with our Lakeview community. Stay tuned for our first broadcast to be available in February.



Linda Vista *Elementary (TK-5)*

5600 S. Ohio St., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7200 • www.lindavistaelementary.org



Kathleen Escaleras-Nappi
Principal

Lions and Scripts and Stages, Oh My! Linda Vista Proudly Presents the Wizard of Oz

This trimester, students in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade performed The Wizard of Oz at the Performing Arts Center, with over 100 students participating in January. The musical was made possible through collaboration with our PTA and Huston Performing Arts, offering students an authentic experience in dance, song, teamwork, and a love of the arts through storytelling. This marked Linda Vista's second performance at the Performing Arts Center, and students were eager to bring



characters to life and sing their hearts out on the big stage. Our PTA and families continue to emphasize the importance of the arts in fostering creativity, collaboration, and confidence for all students performing in our school musical. Thank you to our entire community for your support. Overall, our musical was a great success, showcasing our students' talent and the themes of love, family, and perseverance down the yellow brick road.



Mabel Paine *Elementary School (TK-5)*

4444 Plumosa Ave., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7210 • www.mabelpaine.org



Kristi Coonan
Principal

Huge Mabel Paine Family Turn-Out at McTeacher Night

We are thrilled to share the amazing success of our McTeacher Family Night! The turnout was truly incredible—thank you to all the families who joined us for this special evening.

It was heartwarming to see so many familiar faces enjoying a night of great food and fun. A special thank you goes out to our amazing teachers who rolled

up their sleeves and served food with big smiles! Their participation made the night extra special for everyone.

We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to our PTA for organizing and supporting this wonderful event. Their hard work and dedication help create lasting memories for our school community. And let's not forget our beloved mascot, Murphy the Mustang, who made a surprise appearance and brought so much excitement to the night! Seeing the kids light up with joy was spectacular!



Melrose Elementary School (TK-5)

974 S. Melrose St., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7220 • melrose.pylusd.org



Janice Weber
Principal

Glad for GLAD!

Melrose is proud to share that all TK-3rd grade teachers and intervention specialists have been trained in Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD©) through the Orange County Department of Education this year. Melrose serves 225 English learners, nearly 65% of our school population. Language acquisition and support are provided throughout the school day in all classes and all subjects. GLAD provides a framework for implementing language strategies to learn both English and core content. In this lesson taught by Ms. Alvarez, our ELD teacher, students are using their knowledge of landforms that they are learning about in science to create a summary paragraph while practicing their speaking, grammar, vocabulary, and writing skills! These lessons require a considerable amount of dedication and collaboration from grade-level teachers and intervention specialists to align ELD lessons with content! When I visit classrooms, I see evidence of GLAD strategies: poster charts with essential questions, visuals, poems, color coding, sentence

patterning frames, sentence strips, and collaborative paragraphs. During GLAD lessons, I hear students participating, speaking, chanting, and singing. I marvel at the students' engagement! GLAD is elevating English Language Development and learning in all subjects at Melrose!



Morse Elementary School (TK-6)

431 E. Morse Ave., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/524-6300 • www.morseschool.net



Kelly Farrell
Principal

Morse Elementary's Winter Performances Spread Holiday Cheer

In December, Morse Elementary students filled the MPR with festive melodies and holiday joy during their highly anticipated winter performances. From the tiniest preschoolers to the seasoned sixth graders, every student took the stage and contributed to the celebration.

Each grade level performed a selection of songs that captured the magic of the season. Preschoolers and TK students charmed the audience with "The Happiest Christmas Tree" and "Peppermint Candy Cane," while older students delighted with lively renditions of "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" and "Mele Kalikimaka."

The performances were more than a showcase of musical talent—they were a celebration of community and togetherness. Families packed the room, their smiles and applause creating an atmosphere of warmth and connection. These moments highlighted the joy and unity that music brings to the Morse Elementary community.

As we step into the new year, the memories of these heartwarming performances remind us of the creativity, dedication, and collaboration that make Morse Elementary such a special place.



Orange County School of Computer Science at Bernardo Yorba (7-8)

5350 Fairmont Blvd., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7400 • www.byms.org



A Model School

The Orange County School of Computer Sciences (OCSCS) is at the forefront of innovation! Our students are launching rockets, building prosthetics, designing wind turbines, and creating their own

brands and small businesses. Robotics and computer science are integrated into math and science classrooms, enhancing learning and real-world applications. Proudly earning the “Schools to Watch” designation, OCSCS has been recognized by Scott Steele, Director of the California League of Educators, as “A model school to model schools.” At OCSCS, we’re not just learning—we’re shaping our future leaders!



Parkview Home School (TK–12)

2189 N. Kraemer Blvd., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7050
www.pyplusdparkview.org



Parkview School Awarded \$10,000 for “Dig-In” Garden Curriculum

Parkview School has been awarded \$10,000 through the Inspired Teacher Grant, provided by the Orange County Community Foundation, thanks to teacher Letty Bernstein, who wrote the grant. This funding will support the implementation of “Dig-In,” a free curriculum developed by the USDA, alongside the purchase of garden materials. The program aims to equip

students with the knowledge and skills to cultivate healthy eating habits through hands-on learning experiences. The curriculum includes activities such as germinating seeds, tending to a garden, journaling, conducting research, taste testing, and preparing meals with a variety of fruits and vegetables. These interactive lessons will help students bridge classroom learning with real-life skills, fostering a foundation for lifelong healthy habits. A highlight of the program is the “Dig-In Garden and Harvest Activity,” where students will apply their learning to practical gardening tasks. The program also emphasizes community

Dominique Polchow
Principal

Buena Vista Virtual Academy (K-12)

4999 Casa Loma Ave., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7026
www.buenavistavirtual.org

involvement, inviting school community members to participate in garden activities and culminating in a celebratory harvest feast.

Buena Vista Virtual Academy Celebrates Early Graduates

Buena Vista Virtual Academy is proud to announce that 12 of its seniors have achieved the remarkable milestone of graduating early at the conclusion of the first semester. This accomplishment reflects their hard work, determination, and dedication to their academic goals. Early graduation is a testament to the flexibility and personalized approach of Buena Vista Virtual Academy, which empowers students to excel at their own pace. These graduates have demonstrated exceptional commitment by completing their coursework ahead of schedule, opening the door to exciting new opportunities. The early graduates now look forward to a variety of paths, including pursuing higher education, entering the workforce, or exploring other personal and professional endeavors. Congratulations to Buena Vista Virtual Academy’s early graduates for their outstanding accomplishment!

Rio Vista *Elementary School (TK-5)*

310 N. Rio Vista St., Anaheim, CA 92806 • 714/986-7240 • www.riovistaschool.org



Brandon Frank
Principal

AVID Family Game Night

On January 16th, Rio Vista Elementary School celebrated the first ever AVID Family Game Night! Hundreds of students and families brought some of their favorite games to play together, and also participated in games connected to the “RIASEC” model from our partnership with Career Connected Schools. Students and families engaged in college and career talk as they navigated their preferences and matched



them with potential career connections listed around the room. Games included Twister (Realistic), Puzzles (Investigative), AVID Blind Drawing Challenge (Artistic), Charades (Social), Cups and Downs (Enterprising), and Giant Jenga (Conventional). Rio Vista scholars were reminded that they are uniquely wired with strengths and interests that can match with any of their future-ready aspirations. We believe that it’s never too early to begin thinking and dreaming of what could be! With so many volunteers, the event highlighted our partnerships with our PTA and our teammates at Valadez Middle School.

Rose Drive *Elementary School (TK-5)*

4700 Rose Dr., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7250 • www.rosedrive.pylusd.org



Trisha Gray
Principal

Rose Drive: A Community that Cares

At Rose Drive Elementary, community support is a cornerstone of our culture. In partnership with our dedicated PTA and our student-led Team Roadrunner, the school has launched meaningful initiatives to support those in need, reflecting our commitment to service.

This year, Team Roadrunner and PTA have already made a significant impact. A canned food drive replenished supplies at the

Cal State Fullerton food pantry, and a toy drive brought joy to families in need at other district schools. Most recently, our Backpack and School Supply Drive has provided crucial resources to families affected by the Pacific Palisades wildfire. By partnering with the Boys and Girls Club in Santa Monica, we’ve extended our reach to help those facing unexpected challenges.

Rose Drive isn’t just about rigorous academics; it’s a place where core values come to life. Through these service projects, we aim to instill empathy, generosity, and a spirit of giving in our students, preparing them to become thoughtful and engaged citizens.

We’re proud of how our school community—students, families, and staff—continues to come together to make a difference. Together, we embody the spirit of caring that defines Rose Drive.



Ruby Drive *Elementary School (TK-6)*

601 Ruby Dr., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/996-1921 • www.rubydrive.org



Lisa Carmona
Principal

Ruby Drive Writes Kindness Stories as Scripts for Real Actors!

Scholars at Ruby Drive eagerly submitted problem-solution stories, solved through acts of kindness, to The Imagination Machine, a professional children's theater company. The actors transformed these original short stories into energetic on-stage performances, bringing the students' ideas to life! Ruby Writers were thrilled to see their words creatively portrayed by the entertaining

actors. This exciting assembly demonstrated the power of writing and how it can influence and inspire others. The experience not only brought joy but also fostered a deeper appreciation for the art of storytelling. The love for writing sparked by this event will leave a lasting impact, nurturing each student's growth as a writer and shaping their educational journey for years to come.



Sierra Vista *Elementary School (TK-6)*

1811 N. Placentia Ave., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7270 • www.sierravistaelementary.org



Debbie Kojima
Principal

Building Community at Sierra Vista Elementary

Sierra Vista Elementary fosters a strong sense of community and collaboration through its Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) systems with engaging activities and lessons. By promoting clear and consistent expectations, the school ensures a safe and nurturing environment

where every student can thrive. Programs such as Big and Little Buddy partnerships encourage mentorship and meaningful connections among students. Community-building activities, such as morning meetings in our classrooms, creates shared experiences and empathy. Together, these efforts create a loving, inclusive atmosphere where all students are supported to grow academically, socially, and emotionally, laying the foundation for lifelong success. Sierra Vista Eagles SOAR to success each and every day!



Big and little Buddies are a way that our classroom communities create mentorships, as well as build positive relationships with their peers.



Recognitions to our Eagles for stand out behavior encourages social responsibility and citizenship.



Students can purchase experiences such as B&C Burgers with the Principal with their Sierra Vista SOAR tickets!

Topaz Elementary School (TK-6)

3232 Topaz Ln., Fullerton, CA 92831 • 714/993-9977 • www.topazschool.org



Dr. Bilma Bermudez
Principal

Topaz Tigers Winter Holiday Performance

December 20, 2024 brought immense joy and smiles to our staff, parents, families, and the entire community. We celebrated our annual Winter Holiday Performance, starring none other than our very own Topaz Tigers, with choreography by our talented Topaz Teachers. The event was a true highlight, with a full house of eager parents and families excited to see their children take the stage.

Our performers, ranging from preschool through 6th grade, danced, sang, and beamed with pride as they showcased their hard work and talent.



Travis Ranch School (TK-8)

5200 Via de la Escuela, Yorba Linda, CA 92887 • 714/986-7460 • www.travisranchschool.org



Kristen Petrovacki
Principal

Travis Ranch Robotics Team Shines at Regional Tournament

We are thrilled to celebrate the success of the Travis Ranch Robotics team, the “Fire Sharks,” who recently showcased their talents at a highly competitive Regional tournament. Competing against 42 teams, the Fire Sharks earned the prestigious “Rising All-Star” award,

highlighting their outstanding skills and determination.

This recognition reflects the dedication of our students, coaches, and supportive parents, whose collective efforts have built a thriving robotics program at Travis Ranch. Their hard work and passion for innovation continue to inspire our community.

The excitement doesn't stop here! Students across the school will have the opportunity to dive into robotics once again in February as the Spring Showdown season kicks off.

We believe this program empowers students to tackle real-world challenges in a fun, collaborative environment. Congratulations to the Fire Sharks on their incredible achievement—we can't wait to see what you accomplish next!



Tuffree Middle School (7-8)

2151 N. Kraemer Blvd., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7480 • www.tuffree.org



Sarah Barton
Principal

Student Recognition Systems

Tuffree Middle School takes pride in their recognition systems for students. Positively recognizing students for a variety of different achievements is a cornerstone of the culture at Tuffree. Students earn Spirit Points daily for participating in school wide dress up days, lunch games, events, and demonstrating the core values of respect, responsibility, and teamwork. There are always students asking the adults on campus how they can earn spirit points, which shows that it does have a positive impact on the school campus. At the end of every quarter, the top point earners are invited to a barbecue hosted by administration and the PBIS team. In addition to the daily opportunities to connect with the school, students are chosen weekly for 'Fierce Falcon of the Week', and have their names written on the ASB window and are announced on the morning announcements. This rotating recognition ensures that each student



is recognized throughout the year. Teachers also choose two students who exemplify the core values of Tuffree to be 'Falcons of the Month'. These students are recognized with gift certificates, a Falcon feather with their name that is displayed in the library, their names on the marquee, and social media broadcasts. The end of the quarter also comes with its own positive academic recognition with Honor Roll, High Honor Roll, and Principal's list for earning a 4.0 GPA. The end of the year brings 2 Students of the Year from each teacher, and several awards that are collectively voted on by staff. Overall, Tuffree Middle School is committed to creating a positive, uplifting atmosphere for all students, and strives to recognize

the outstanding efforts of the student body in multiple ways on a consistent basis.

Tynes Elementary School (TK-6)

735 Stanford Dr., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/996-5550 • www.johnotynes.org



Dr. Christa Borgese
Principal

A Nurturing Community

Tynes Elementary School is a vibrant and nurturing community where students thrive through unique programs like the Big Buddies initiative. Each week, older classes team up with younger students to read books, write stories, and complete crafts together, fostering mentorship, creativity, and a strong sense of community. This month, the school is also buzzing with excitement as it prepares for its first-ever PTA-sponsored talent show. And to top it off, Tynes is collaborating with two other elementary schools and Kraemer Middle School for an exciting production of *The Wizard of Oz* at Valencia High School in May. It's shaping up to be an unforgettable year filled with fun, creativity, and teamwork!



Valadez Middle School Academy (6-8)

161 E. La Jolla St., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7440 • www.valadezacademy.org



Will Truong
Principal

Eagle TV Soaring to New Heights

Valadez MSA and our Soaring Eagles are building a state-of-the-art studio to help our students acquire work-based learning through video production. Under the leadership and expertise of teacher Sue Sawyer, our Video Production Program at Valadez Middle School Academy has doubled the number of students enrolled in this elective course, now

totaling forty-five. In this class, students learn valuable skills such as communication through conversations and interviews, collaboration through teamwork in video production, and critical thinking when troubleshooting technical issues throughout the filming and editing process. Students have also gained invaluable experience, such as filming videos for the school and organizations like USA Softball. Students in this pathway will receive priority registration in the ValTech AME pathway at our feeder high school, Valencia HS, when they promote from Valadez, forging a path to success and building on the experiences they gained in the Eagle TV Pathway.



Valencia High School (9-12)

500 N. Bradford, Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/996-4970 • www.vhstigers.org



Chris Herzfeld
Principal

Valencia High School Moving to Block Schedule for 2025-26 School Year

After four years of study, the staff at Valencia High School have recommended a shift to a block schedule for next school year.

A block schedule is a daily schedule that includes longer class periods and fewer classes each day. While there are many variations of block schedule throughout Orange County, we selected a model with

three class periods a day with an embedded tutorial period. Wednesdays will continue as a late-start, six-period day.

Our mission statement calls for supporting every student through high expectations in a nurturing environment in order to ensure success now and in the future.

Two primary benefits for our students will be workload balance for our students with intense schedules, and embedded time to get extra help and do homework for those students who need built-in time for tutoring or monitored homework completion.

- **Workload Balance and Wellness** - Reducing the daily focus from six classes per day to three classes per day can dramatically help student focus, and reduce the physical, intellectual and emotional demands on our students on any given day.
- **Built-in Tutorial and Homework Time** - As proposed, our block days will include a 31 minute tutorial period attached to one of the student's classes, on a rotating basis. Students will use this time to get extra help, complete homework, prepare for exams or simply organize themselves.

In block schools we visited, students and teachers reported a calmer, more focused environment, deeper learning and less stress that benefited everyone from IB students to those who struggle with learning.

An undertaking like this would not be successful if our staff weren't committed to making it happen - but this came from staff and over 80% of teachers are supportive of this move. We know there will be some challenges, but we are confident that the calmer, balanced school day with embedded tutorial time will benefit all students.

Van Buren *Elementary School (TK-6)*

1245 N. Van Buren St., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7100 • www.vanburenelementary.org



David Cammarato
Principal

Building Bridges to Success: The Power of PBIS

At Van Buren Elementary, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) creates a bridge that unites staff, students, and families in building a cohesive and positive school culture. By fostering a shared commitment to safety, readiness, responsibility, respect, and compassion, PBIS transforms our campus into a place where all students feel empowered to reach

their full potential. As part of our mid-year training, we are revisiting these essential ideas across campus to ensure our entire school community remains aligned and dedicated to these foundational principles. Together, we are shaping a brighter future for every child, one positive interaction at a time.

PBIS is a proactive, research-based approach designed to cultivate a positive school environment and improve student behavior. It begins with explicitly teaching school-wide behavior expectations across different settings on campus. At Van Buren Elementary, these expectations are clearly defined: students are Safe, There and Ready,

Act Responsibly, Respectful, and Show Compassion. By teaching these values intentionally, we empower students to understand and embrace the behaviors that contribute to a thriving school culture. Our staff consistently models these expectations, reinforcing them through daily interactions to create a unified understanding across the campus.

Recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors is a cornerstone of PBIS. Students who meet or exceed expectations receive consistent and meaningful recognition, which reinforces the importance of their positive actions. This approach not only motivates individual students but also sets a powerful standard for the entire school community. Celebrating positive behavior fosters an environment where students feel valued, supported, and inspired to succeed.

PBIS also emphasizes early intervention for at-risk students. Through ongoing monitoring, our staff identifies students who may benefit from additional support and provides tailored interventions to meet their unique needs. This proactive strategy ensures that every child has the opportunity to thrive both academically and socially, contributing to the success of our entire school community.

Wagner *Elementary School (TK-6)*

717 E. Yorba Linda Blvd., Placentia, CA 92870 • 714/986-7180 • www.wagnerwildcats.org



Kyleen Fennema
Principal

Wagner's 6th Grade Wildcats Return from Science Camp!

They're back! Wagner's 6th grade wildcats have returned from a week of outdoor science school at Emerald Cove Outdoor Science Institute in the San Bernardino mountains. Students experienced hands-on lessons in ecology, geology, biology, and more! Each student returned with their own unique

highlights of this amazing week. Some loved the night hikes, some the bug hunts and forest hikes, while some loved studying the night stars the most. For some, it was the camp experience including games, songs, skits, team building, and cabin life. More than just a field trip, this experience fostered independence, sparked curiosity, and created lasting memories. Our young wildcats returned with expanded knowledge, newfound skills, and a deeper appreciation for the natural world and for science. Every one of our 6th grade campers made memories that will last well beyond their years at Wagner! We are grateful to our Wagner family community, our PTA, PYLUSD, and our fantastic teachers for making this experience possible.



Woodsboro Elementary School (TK-6)

7575 Woodsboro Ave., Anaheim, CA 92807 • 714/986-7040 • woodsboro.pylusd.org



Rachael Collins
Principal

Woodsboro Spreads Holiday Cheer through Generosity

The Woodsboro school community came together this holiday season to make a meaningful difference for students and families. Through donation to the Honey Pot Care Closet, several students were able to select and wrap gifts for their loved ones, fostering a spirit of giving and gratitude.

Staff members adopted a family from the school, pooling their resources to provide thoughtful presents. The school's PBIS student leaders joined the effort by carefully wrapping the gifts, ensuring the family felt the holiday warmth and care.

Upper-grade student leaders extended the holiday



spirit by organizing a successful book drive. Their efforts culminated in a delightful Holiday Book Boutique, allowing primary-grade students to choose books during their library visits.

This collective effort highlights the power of compassion and collaboration, making the holidays brighter for everyone in the Woodsboro community. It's a heartwarming reminder of the joy in giving.



Yorba Linda Middle School (6-8)

4777 Casa Loma Ave., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7080 • www.ylms.org



Paige Stills
Principal

YLMS Earns Redesignation as a Schools to Watch

We are thrilled to announce that YLMS has been redesignated as a Schools to Watch, a recognition awarded by the National Forum. This honor reflects our ongoing commitment to excellence in academics, social equity, developmental responsiveness, and organizational structures that support student success.

This achievement would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of our incredible teachers and staff. Their commitment to continuous improvement and creating an exemplary teaching and learning environment makes YLMS stand out. Together, they have cultivated a school community where every student is empowered now and in the future. We thank them for their passion, innovation, and efforts in making our school a place of excellence.



CALIFORNIA
SCHOOLS TO WATCH
HIGH PERFORMING MODEL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Yorba Linda High School (9-12)

1900 Bastanchury Rd., Yorba Linda, CA 92886 • 714/986-7500 • www.ylhs.org



Bird Potter
Principal

A Successful First Semester

Yorba Linda High School celebrated a successful first semester filled with exceptional achievements in academics, athletics, and the arts.

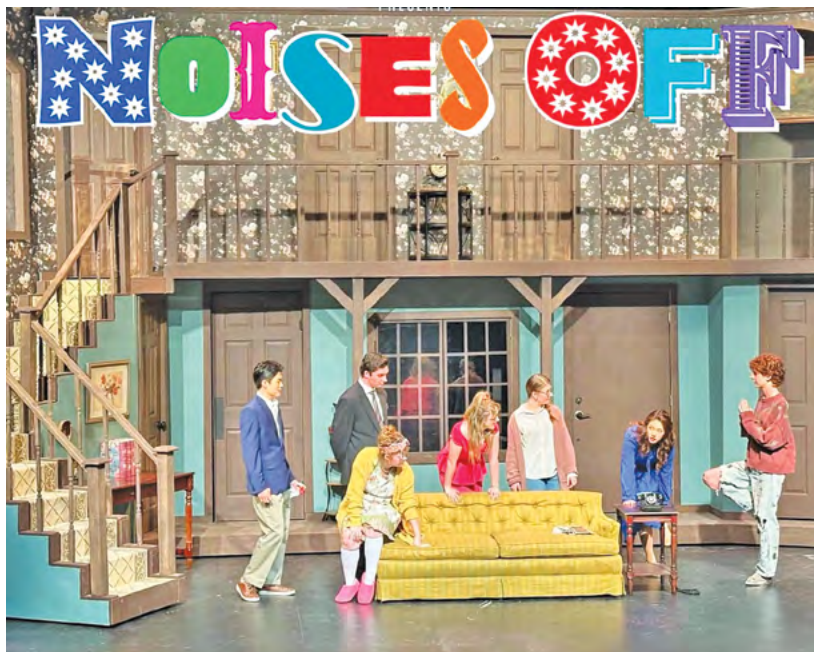
The Mustang Theater Company delighted audiences with their fall production of *Noises Off!*, earning rave reviews for its comedic

brilliance. The Mustang Dance Company's winter show, *Waves*, was a captivating showcase of skill and artistry, while the Mustang Band, Choir, and Orchestra delivered outstanding performances at events like the District Choir Show and the Sinfonia Concert.

In athletics, YLHS excelled with three league championships in Women's Volleyball, Women's Tennis, and Men's Water Polo. Football reached the CIF Division 2 semifinals, and Women's Cross Country placed 8th in the state for the second consecutive year in Division 3.

The school also earned national recognition, ranking in the top 10% of schools by U.S. News & World Report.

These accomplishments highlight the dedication and talent of YLHS students and staff. Go Mustangs!



Musical String Instruments Word Search Contest

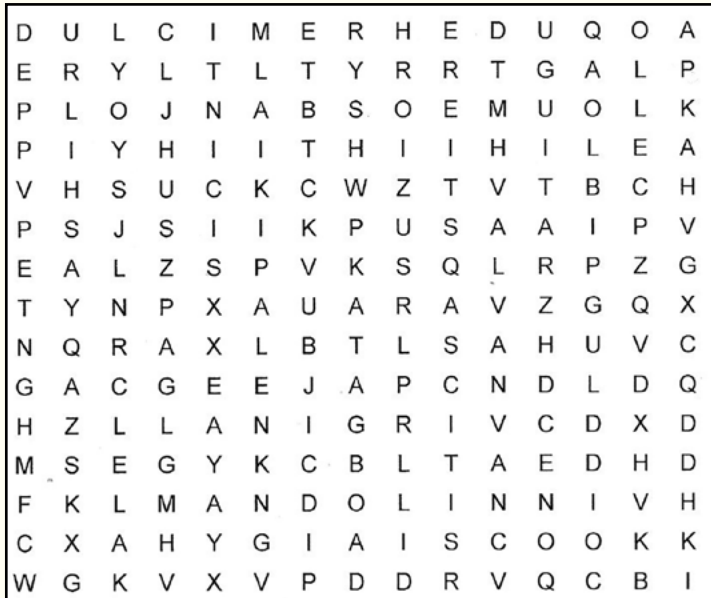
Rules! One word in the list is NOT in the word search.

When you have completed the word search, one word will be left and that word you email to: SchoolNewsKay@gmail.com (Please put PYLUSD in the subject line)

Entries must be received by March 15, 2025

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

- | | |
|-------------|----------|
| BALALAIKA | LYRE |
| BANJO | MANDOLIN |
| BASS VIOL | ORGAN |
| CELLO | PIANO |
| CLAVICHORD | SITAR |
| CONTRABASS | UKULELE |
| DULCIMER | VIOLA |
| GUITAR | VIOLIN |
| HARPSICHORD | ZITHER |
| LUTE | |



Congratulations Joshua Thio
Winner of our November Contest!

Orange County Department of Education

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

5-3-1 Strategic Plan adds up to OCDE's path forward



Dr. Stefan Bean
Superintendent

The holiday season is a natural time for reflection. For organizations like ours, it's also a chance to assess progress, refine approaches and pursue new opportunities for innovation.

With 2024 coming to a close, and as I near the six-month mark as county superintendent, this feels like an opportune moment to share where the Orange County Department of Education is headed — and

how we plan to get there.

Recently, we introduced a roadmap designed to guide our work, build on our strengths and set a unified vision for the future. Shaped through active collaboration with educational leaders and community partners, it's called the 5-3-1 Strategic Plan because it's built around five key initiatives, three objectives to support our districts, and one bold goal.

So, what exactly is in our 5-3-1 Strategic Plan? Let's take a look.

Five Key Initiatives

Five forward-thinking initiatives anchor this plan, targeting areas where innovation can have the most significant impact on students and schools. These include:

- Expanding career technical education. Along with broadening and enhancing CTE programs, we are looking to sharpen our focus on inclusivity, ensuring that these opportunities are accessible to all students.
- Fostering emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence, or EQ, refers to the ability to understand and manage emotions effectively. These skills are essential for educators, administrators, support staff and students to build strong relationships and healthy learning environments.
- Integrating artificial intelligence. We are actively exploring and pursuing advanced AI technologies that will enhance learning experiences and streamline administrative processes.
- Ensuring school safety. Our commitment to creating secure educational environments will be stronger than ever, supported by comprehensive safety measures and processes.
- Providing innovative funding opportunities. We are looking to create new funding opportunities to back innovative educational projects that can transform learning environments — and ideally be replicated elsewhere.

Three Support Objectives

Next are three objectives that are specific to the support we provide for our 28 local school districts. These are:

- Legal, legislative and fiscal support. We will equip districts with the tools and training they need to manage complex educational policies and fiscal challenges.
- Academic focus. We remain committed to educational excellence through targeted instructional services and programs that support student success.
- Local superintendent needs. We're providing customized resources to address the unique challenges faced by Orange County's superintendents in service of their districts.

Finally, we come to the last part of our plan.

One Big Audacious Goal

Our big audacious goal refers to the work we are doing to improve outcomes and opportunities for all students enrolled in OCDE's Alternative Education program, known as ACCESS. This involves actively soliciting feedback from staff, local superintendents and other key partners to craft a comprehensive vision for ACCESS.

As part of this effort, we aim to improve mechanisms for measuring progress and ensuring continuous improvement across all student programs under the ACCESS umbrella. We are also moving forward with plans to develop an ethnic studies curriculum for ACCESS that uplifts our communities and enhances cultural awareness.

OCDE's 5-3-1 Strategic Plan reflects not only our collective aspirations but also our county's shared commitment to innovation and continuous improvement in support of students, families and schools. Think of it as a roadmap that draws on the strengths of our educators as well as the voices of our communities.

Six months into this role, I feel deeply honored to be on this journey with you. I am also confident that we have the people and resources to drive transformative, lasting change. Together, we can create a future where every student thrives, every school becomes a place of possibility, and every community benefits from a strong, cohesive educational system.

Thank you for your trust and partnership. Now let's make this vision a reality.

OCDE • Continued *Page 23*

Orange County Department of Education

(Continued from page 22)

Emotional Intelligence + Community Collaboration = Leading with Heart

Throughout my career, two principles have emerged as essential to effective leadership in education: emotional intelligence and actively involving key partners in major decisions.

These aren't new ideas, but time and experience have anchored them as crucial pillars that build and strengthen the connections between our students, educators and the broader community.

Let's start with emotional intelligence, which goes beyond recognizing our own feelings. It's about understanding the emotions of others, managing our reactions, and dealing with each other with empathy. This skill is vital in education because it influences how teachers interact with students, how students engage with one another, and how we all navigate the complexities of learning environments.

Research certainly backs up the importance of emotional intelligence in education, a topic I explored closely in my doctoral dissertation.

Studies show that teachers who are more attuned to their own emotions and those of others generally build stronger relationships with their students. These connections can significantly boost student performance in critical areas like reading and math. Notably, the data suggest that the benefits are even greater for students of color, highlighting how emotional intelligence can help close achievement gaps.

Equally important is the principle of involving those most affected by our decisions in the decision-making process — a point my staff has likely heard me emphasize repeatedly.

Drawing inspiration from globally successful educational models, we recognize the need to embrace academic rigor and cultivate 21st-century skills in science, technology,

engineering, the arts and math. However, I believe true leadership also involves actively soliciting and valuing the input of all our partners, including students, parents, teachers, administrators and support staff.

This approach guarantees that our decisions reflect the collective needs and insights of the communities we serve. In that way, it not only leads to more informed choices but also fosters trust and accountability, transforming families

and employees from passive recipients into active contributors.

My personal experiences as an English language learner and a student with a disability have deeply influenced my commitment to these principles. Growing up, teachers and mentors took the time to understand, nurture and guide me, which in turn fueled my passion to advocate for policies that are inclusive and supportive.

Collectively, I call this leading with heart. It's an ethos that

emphasizes empathy, compassion and genuine concern for the well-being of others. It involves understanding the personal and professional needs of team members and making decisions that are not only logical but also considerate of their feelings and circumstances. Those who lead with heart prioritize the human element in their leadership style, fostering trust and respect that ultimately results in stronger outcomes.

So here's my call to action: As we move forward, I invite every member of our community to join us on this journey, embracing a path guided by emotional intelligence as well as meaningful collaborations and community involvement. Together, we can build educational systems that truly lead with heart, honoring the potential of every student.

By teaching and leading with heart, we can make a lasting impact, ensuring that every individual feels cared for and valued — just as I did.

As we move forward, I invite every member of our community to join us on this journey, embracing a path guided by emotional intelligence as well as meaningful collaborations and community involvement.



Note-ables



Kate Karp

Magic Beans

“Once upon a time, there were magic beans thrown away onto the dusty ground” begins the poem in Magic Beans’ liner notes. That’s the spirit of this collection by songwriter/musician Eric Herman and his spunky backup band, the Puppy Dogs, aka Dave Pettey and Ben Macy.

The songs are a riotous take on being a young person or the parent of one, especially an opinionated, annoying, know-it-all and downright likeable youngster with a fertile imagination and a knack for getting into trouble. He puts “Google Eyes” on everything from European landmarks to dad’s laptop—“I mean, it said Google, right?” Did you unfailingly trust your older sibling no matter how much trouble it got you into? “My Brother” will hit a chord. “Stinker,” which this child certainly is,



tosses out contradictory statements about behavior: he won’t be afraid of the dark if you put on the light, he’ll be patient if he doesn’t have to wait.

The songs aren’t all about shenanigans. “Merry-Go-Round” is a metaphor for life and the planet, both of which go round and round and up and down. “Remember” tells how the same child helps his beloved grandma go through dementia. “Go” tells where

your imagination can take you if you’re in a bad mood or a rut, which is the point of the collection.

The melodies are catchy and as imaginative as are the lyrics, which you can find, along with videos and other goodies, [right here](#).

Remember, there’s no ground too dusty for planting and growing our Magic Beans!

Swingset Serenade

The title *Swingset Serenade* describes both a backyard toy and a collection of cool, classic 1930s soundalikes. The songs are true representations of jazz and big band; fans of the genres—parents, grandparents, great-grands—will dig it. And younger minds might become curious about hearing more jazz and swing.

The collection is a labor of love by vocalist/songwriter Melanie Dill and musician/musicologist Tom Johnson. Dill grew up on jazz—an early memory is listening to her grandfather play it on his ukulele in the Philippines—and Johnson has explored everything from bebop to bossa nova.

The big band horns on the title tune sound like the start of a classic movie with music in all its black-and-white

glory. Children and adults trade artful solos, backed with a bilingual chorus. Three other numbers—“Jugo de Naranja,” “Mariposa,” and “Me Gustan las Estrellas”—are sung in Spanish with repetitive, clear lyrics that can be taught to children as they cha-cha. “Make a Garden” combines a banjo with the fastest delivery of lyrics you could tap a toe to. “Ruth’s Couscous” sounds like a feature song from a Shirley Temple vehicle, with the added element of teaching youngsters what’s in that dish. There are more words to rhyme with couscous, by the way, than you could shake a sheaf of semolina at.

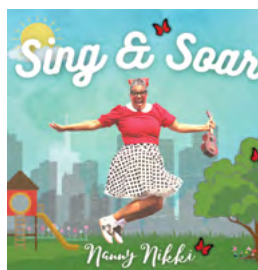
Plug in the phonograph, drop the needle, and you’ll be dancing with Alice Faye and Desi Arnaz (look them up if you don’t know). Every hepcat and cool kitten will have a swingin’ time with this collection!

Sing & Soar with Nanny Nikki

“Nanny Nikki” Rung, her ukulele and her two Dapper Dudes have cued up a musical outing for us! We’re going to dance at the playground, rock to the beat, and learn some valuable lessons while we’re having the best time ever!

“Sing & Soar” is a dream of a collection of songs. Some will choke you up. Some will make you move. Each of them will leave you with a trail of earworms, and you won’t mind a bit.

The infectious ska rhythm on the opener, “The Beat,” introduces a celebration of street musicians who pound buckets and pails on the streets of Nikki’s native Chicago and who sometimes get run off by the police! “Yuk Your



Yum” talks about not raining on someone’s parade. “Almost Made It” begins with being too late to get to the bathroom, but that’s just the attention-getter—it’s really about supporting your friends and yourself in never giving up on anything. “Playground Day” welcomes all children to play, no matter what they look like, where they come from, or how dirty they get.

The collection closes on a soft, thoughtful note with “I Can’t Hear the Moon.” Of course, you can’t. You can’t hear a smile, a touch or love, either, but you know they’re there.

Children deserve a nanny like Nanny Nikki, and so did we when we were little. We can all have one now!

“Sing & Soar” can be streamed on [Spotify](#) and [Amazon Music](#).

Kate Karp is an editor for *School News Roll Call* and a freelance writer and editor.