

School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation

Covering the Saddleback Valley Unified School District



Volume 8, Issue 28

February 2025

Season of Success: Celebrating Achievements in SVUSD





Ioana Pal, Psy.D.,
clinical psychologist,
Stramski Children's
Developmental Center,
Miller Children's & Women's
Hospital Long Beach

Helping Kids Conquer Bedtime Worries

Many parents have faced the challenge of comforting a child who struggles to fall asleep because of worries or fears. This situation can leave parents feeling helpless, but understanding the root causes of bedtime anxiety is key to finding solutions.

Bedtime is often the first quiet moment children experience all day. This stillness gives their minds time to focus on unresolved worries such as academic pressures, social challenges, family concerns, or even broader fears about the world, which can make it harder to fall asleep.

Establishing a consistent bedtime routine is one of the best ways to ease bedtime anxiety. A predictable, calming routine provides a sense of security and signals to the brain that it's time to wind down. Activities such as reading a favorite book, practicing deep breathing, or listening to soothing music can promote relaxation. Limiting screen time and establishing a wind-down period also supports better sleep.

Setting aside time earlier in the evening to address concerns can help alleviate stress at bedtime. Encourage your child to share their worries with you and help them brainstorm solutions. Frame their concerns in a positive, manageable way while validating their feelings and offering reassurance.

Parents should also be aware of signs that their child may need additional support. Persistent sleep difficulties, excessive daytime anxiety, or recurring nightmares could indicate a deeper issue. Look for behavioral changes such as irritability, trouble concentrating, or declining school performance. If these concerns persist, it may be helpful to consult your pediatrician or mental health professional.

By understanding and addressing bedtime anxiety, parents can not only help their children sleep better but also equip them with tools to manage stress and worries throughout their lives.

The Stramski Children's Developmental Center at Miller Children's & Women's Hospital provides comprehensive care for children with behavioral and developmental conditions, including anxiety and sleep-related challenges. The center's expert team offers individualized care in a family-centered environment, ensuring families receive the support they need to thrive.

If you would like to learn more about behavioral and development care offered through the Stramski Children's Developmental Center, visit millerchildrens.org/Stramski.



Pablo, Age 6

At 11 months, Pablo was fighting for his life.

Today, he's got six candles on his cake.

Failing organs. Eight months in a coma. Fighting for every breath. At 11 months old, this is what Leukemia brought Pablo. The one bright spot, he was at MemorialCare Miller Children's & Women's Hospital where a team of top doctors, nurses, and specialists helped save his life. For over a year in the PICU, our highly-trained staff never stopped caring for Pablo and his family. *Caring is our calling.*

Learn more at millerchildrens.org/care


**Miller Children's
& Women's Hospital**
MemorialCare..

MILLER CHILDREN'S & WOMEN'S HOSPITAL LONG BEACH
CHERESE MARI LAULHERE CHILDREN'S VILLAGE
OUTPATIENT SPECIALTY CENTERS
FROM THE SOUTH BAY TO ORANGE COUNTY

Board of Education



Suzie R. Swartz
President



Barbara Schulman
Vice President



Dan Walsh
Clerk



Amanda Morrell
Member



Michele Sparks
Member



Forrest Frey
Student Member

Superintendent



Dr. Crystal Turner
Superintendent

Season of Success: Celebrating Achievements in SVUSD

The Saddleback Valley Unified School District (SVUSD) is in the midst of a season of success, with exceptional achievements across academics, athletics, and the arts highlighting the district's commitment to excellence.

Recent updates to the California School Dashboard showcased strong district-wide performance. Graduation rates climbed to 93.2%, with significant improvements among

English learners (+10%) and homeless youth (+6.3%). Chronic absenteeism dropped by nearly 5%, while English and math scores showed positive gains. These results underscore SVUSD's dedication to equitable and engaging practices that empower every student.

In athletics, the girls' cross-country teams from Trabuco Hills and El Toro High Schools delivered historic victories, each claiming championship titles at both the CIF Southern Section and State Cross Country competitions. Trabuco Hills excelled in Division I, while El Toro dominated Division II, reflecting their teamwork, resilience, and athletic prowess.

The arts also shone brightly, with Mission Viejo and Trabuco Hills High School band and color guard programs earning first-place titles in their respective classes at the 2024 Western Band Association Class Championship Tournament. Their performances highlighted the passion and leadership driving SVUSD's thriving arts programs.

This season of success demonstrates SVUSD's unwavering commitment to fostering excellence in all areas and celebrating milestones that inspire students and the community alike. These achievements are just some of the recent successes across the district, with many others highlighted in the articles provided by each SVUSD department and school site, showcasing the collective dedication to ensuring every student has the opportunity to thrive.

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

RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA HONDA
SALES • SERVICE • PARTS
Simply the best!

29961 Santa Margarita Pkwy, Rancho Santa Margarita, Ca 92688
949-713-2000 | www.rsmhondaonline.com

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 Saddleback Valley Unified School District does not endorse the advertisers in this publication.





SPRING EVENTS



Love Your Garden Workshop
Saturday, February 22
9:30 – 11:30 AM

Get your garden ready for spring with expert tips on pruning, pest control, and drip irrigation. Bring your succulent plant cuttings to share with fellow gardeners.

FREE
Compost &
Mulch for
Attendees



Home Leak Expo
Saturday, March 22
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Protect your home from costly water leaks! Discover how smart leak detection devices can help you stay ahead of potential issues.

- Live demos from experts
- Enter to win a low-flow toilet or leak protection devices



Home Garden Tour & Design Expo
Saturday, April 19
9:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Explore stunning Mediterranean-inspired, drought-tolerant gardens on a self-guided tour.

- Meet horticulture experts
- Get inspired

INFRASTRUCTURE TOURS

A Behind the Scenes Look at Your Water Provider



Upcoming Tour Dates

Friday, March 7
4:30 – 6:30 PM

California's largest recycled water reservoir:
Trampas Reservoir

Thursday, March 13
9:00 – 10:30 AM

Emergency Drinking Water Storage: Upper
Chiquita Reservoir

Tuesday, April 22
4:30 – 5:30 PM

The rebuilding of a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant:
Oso Creek in Mission Viejo.



Save your Seat!
Register today.



Ask Dr. Shari



Dr. Shari Sweetnam

Good for the Mind & Great for the Heart

The way we choose to spend our time and the activities in which we engage help form our value system. With a wide array of possibilities and opportunities, volunteering is a positive and vastly beneficial way of helping young people develop a strong sense of self.

Volunteering offers benefits spanning from the intellectual and spiritual to the educational and professional. As young people give of themselves and their time, they can learn about being selfless. In a busy world of "pursuit of personal happiness," too often the intrinsic values of empathy and giving are the lessons that are overlooked. Helping others via a structured volunteer program is a positive and safe way to develop oneself in this regard.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself, is to lose yourself in the service of others." Teens who experience growth at an early age are likely to continue cultivating positive behavior and friendships.

Motivational Speaker, Founder of *The Brainpower Programs for Schools*, Author, Consultant, Radio Host contact: info@doctorshari.com, twitter: DrShariS, Youtube: Dr. ShariS, LinkedIN: Dr. Shari Sweetnam

**Now Enrolling
25% Off First Month**

**The #1 after-school
coding program
in Silicon Valley
2:1 ratio Code Tutoring**



**Sign Up For A Free In-Person
Sample Lesson**

**Two locations accessible to our
South Orange County residents**

**Scratch, Python, Java, AP CS, GameDev
Unity/C#, Roblox/Lua, Minecraft
C++, HTML and more...**



27660 Marguerite Pkwy Suite G,
Mission Viejo near Crown Pkwy
thecoderschool.com/missionviejo
mv@thecoderschool.com
(949) 525-9332

14200 Culver Dr #200, Irvine
Heritage Plaza Shopping Center
thecoderschool.com/irvine
irvine@thecoderschool.com
(949) 655-0388



EVERY CHILD PLAYS • USYVL.ORG



Mission Viejo at Granada Park

Thursday, April 3, 2025 - Saturday, June 7, 2025
Thursdays 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM & Saturdays 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM

Aliso Viejo at Acorn Park

Wednesday, April 2, 2025 - Saturday, June 7, 2025
Wednesdays 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM & Saturdays 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM



Boys and Girls ages 7-15

Registration price includes a t-shirt



Plan Ahead & Save

Early: \$150 due by 03/01/25*

*with discount code SPREG25

Late: \$200 until 04/01/25

USYVL Non-Profit #77-0460698

©USYVL All Rights Reserved

**register
today!**
usyvl.org

UNITED STATES YOUTH



VOLLEYBALL LEAGUE™

Educational Services

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



Liza Zielasko
Assistant
Superintendent

AI Integration in SVUSD: Empowering Teachers and Students for the Future

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming education, and in Saddleback Valley Unified School District (SVUSD), an AI specialist is leading the integration efforts. The AI specialist is supporting K-12 students,

teachers, staff, and the community by establishing

AI guidelines, providing professional development, and fostering collaboration with AI consortiums and think tanks. A cohort of teachers, students, staff, and community members has been created to promote meaningful technology integration.

SVUSD has provided AI professional development to over 500 teachers,

building AI literacy and setting clear expectations for use. The district is piloting an AI tool at Santiago STEAM Elementary School, launched with a student keynote event.

SVUSD collaborates with AI consortiums like OCDE and has also formed the Tech Forward Task Force (TF2), a team dedicated to responsible AI integration. These efforts position SVUSD at the forefront of AI education.



Presentation on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to a group of high school parents, students, teachers and administrators discussing ethical and appropriate use of AI in education.

Business Services

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



Robert Craven
Assistant
Superintendent

District Expands Internet Capacity and Upgrades Equipment to Boost Efficiency and Connectivity

In a major step forward for students and staff, the District's Technology Services team has successfully upgraded the district-wide Internet connection from 10Gb to 40Gb. This fourfold increase ensures the growing demands of classroom instruction and daily business operations are well-supported. As part of this project,

Technology Services staff installed new routers that provide an extra layer of reliability, allowing the District's Internet service to continue working smoothly even if one piece of equipment fails.

Over the summer, the team also upgraded network hardware across all school sites and the District Office. By installing modern network switches, they have set the stage for faster Internet speeds and stronger Wi-Fi coverage. These improvements benefit classrooms, outdoor learning areas, and offices alike. With the latest Wi-Fi 6 technology now in place, students and teachers

can access online instructional programs and testing websites more quickly and reliably than before.

Alongside these Internet and networking enhancements, Technology Services also introduced new Xerox copiers across all school sites and the District Office. These machines can handle printing and copying tasks at speeds of 55, 72, or 100 pages per minute. They feature easy-to-replace toner and staples, reducing the need for storing extra supplies. The copiers are even programmed to order their own toner, which will be delivered directly to each school.

Continuing its successful partnership with Xerox, the District benefits from a local service and support team that is ready to address any issues. The new copiers also feature updated software simplifying printing, scanning, and sending documents. Users can easily save files directly to Google Drive, PaperCut, or email.

Thanks to these upgrades, the District's technology infrastructure is now more robust, efficient, and reliable—empowering students, teachers, and staff with the tools they need for a more connected educational experience.

Human Resources

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



Dr. Darvin Jackson
Assistant
Superintendent

Benefits Structure/Plan

SVUSD in collaboration with the Benefits Council, consisting of classified, certificated and management representatives, spent more than a year researching, interviewing and finally selecting a new benefits structure/plan in an effort to mitigate ongoing rising health care costs. Due to the efforts of this group, SVUSD was able to avoid the possibility of realizing on average a 20% renewal increase through robust negotiations with insurance companies resulting in a moderate 6% increase.

Thanks to all SVUSD members who participated in this process, as their efforts continue to afford staff reasonable rates and quality services.

There is a shortage of Education Specialist who serve students with disabilities across the state of California. In an effort to attract and retain teachers in this specific area, SVUSD is proactively recruiting mid-year graduates from many colleges and universities in California. The Human Resources Department will be scheduling a recruitment and hiring fair in February to identify highly qualified candidates in this area. Please share with your friends and family as SVUSD is a great place to work.

Student Support Services

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



Dr. Francis Dizon
Assistant
Superintendent

SVUSD Clothing Boutique: Empowering Families

The SVUSD Clothing Boutique, launched in the 2024/25 school year, expanded the Student Marketplace to provide clothing, home goods, and gently used toys. Partnering with local food banks

like Second Harvest and Family Assistance Ministries, the boutique supports McKinney-Vento families from Gates, Los Alisos, and Silverado High School.

Open on select Fridays from 1:30-3:30 PM, the boutique offers a dignified shopping experience for families in need. Funded through ARP and HERFA grants, and supported by community donations, the initiative provides essential resources to district families.

Accessible through site Student Champions, the boutique represents a sustainable community support system, bridging gaps and providing crucial assistance to students and their families.



Cielo Vista *Elementary School*

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



Janette Tyrone
Principal

HAWKS Hangout

Cielo Vista is excited to announce the grand re-opening of the HAWKS Hangout! This newly transformed space has been completely re-imagined and repurposed, with many generous donations from our local community. The vision for this peaceful and engaging space was crafted by Cielo Vista Counselor Nancy

Marroquin, along with Jennifer Jackson, one of our Multilingual Instructional Aides.

The goal was to create a calming, zen-like environment where students can connect with their peers in a relaxed setting. The updated hangout features a variety of interactive activities, including a large Lego wall and table, a puzzle building table, oversized bean bags, and an extra-large coloring wall. There are also stations for activities like board games and beading, offering students an opportunity to unwind and engage in soothing creative activities.

The space is designed with calming music and soft lighting, along with beautiful curtains and decor to foster a tranquil atmosphere. It's the perfect place for students to relax and recharge in a peaceful, supportive environment.



de Portola *Elementary School*

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



Kimberly Slawson
Principal

Developing Leaders: The PAL Program at de Portola Elementary

At de Portola Elementary, our Peer Assistance Leadership (PAL) program empowers 55 students from 4th, 5th, and 6th grades to become confident, compassionate leaders. Guided by advisors Mrs. Leslie Harrison and Mrs. Zoie Lange, students engage in leadership training that builds skills in

teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

Key program components include lessons on self-awareness, cooperation, healthy living, communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, goal setting, and self-evaluation. These skills are reinforced through activities and two retreats scheduled for December and February, offering students hands-on leadership opportunities.

By year's end, PAL participants will receive certificates from the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) for completing peer leadership training, a testament to their dedication and growth.

We're proud of these future leaders and the positive impact they're making on our school community, embodying the values of integrity, kindness, and responsibility.



Del Cerro *Elementary School*

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



Dawn Lam
Principal

5th and 6th Grade Informances Shine Bright at Del Cerro

On December 19, 2024, Del Cerro Elementary hosted its 5th and 6th Grade Informances, drawing an incredible turnout of over 80 parents eager to witness music instruction in action. The event showcased the hard work and talent of our budding musicians, featuring performances on trumpet, clarinet, and violin, alongside vocal music.

The highlight of the day was Mr. Keegan's Vocal Music class singing "This is Me" from The Greatest Showman. The heartfelt performance brought many to tears, reinforcing the power of music to connect and inspire.

Parents who engaged with the performances and embraced the school spirit were rewarded with MTSS SEB "Splash Tickets" for "riding the wave" and supporting our students.

A heartfelt thank you to the Del Cerro Music team for organizing this memorable event that celebrated the arts and strengthened our school community!



Del Lago *Elementary School*

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



Dr. Frances Hansell
Principal

Del Lago's Youngest Learners Shine Bright!

Our amazing teachers Mrs. Root, Mrs. Marcot, Mrs. Diaz, Mrs. Johnston, and our K-1 students warmed our hearts with the sounds of the season! Their winter performance was a testament to their hard work, joy, and creativity put forth. We were thrilled to welcome standing room only

performances for our school community in celebrating together and supporting these bright stars as they shared their talents. This delightful showcase of talent and creativity featured songs and dances that transported the audience into a festive adventure. Thank you to everyone who came out to support these budding stars and made the event a success. Your smiles from ear to ear told the story! Stay tuned for more news about Del Lago's celebration of the Arts and our Variety Show coming this Spring 2025!



El Toro High School

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



Dr. James Martin
Principal

STEAM Academy

The STEAM Academy at El Toro High School is designed for students who seek a 21st century education that integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. Students engage in real-world problem solving and collaborative experiences

that prepare them for their postsecondary future aspirations. ETHS offers a wide range of UCCI and C-STEM course offerings that integrate engineering, sustainability, robotics, and media arts into traditional core content classes. Our robust CTE programs add hands-on experiences for our STEAM students that help promote solutions for local and global issues. Each year students participate in project-based learning activities such as Fast Fashion, California Bioregions, as well as the creation of game portfolios that are reviewed by industry insiders at

Blizzard, Inc. ETHS STEAM students love learning in the STEAM Academy because they enjoy the interdisciplinary projects, the community feel of a cohort of friends in the same classes, and the amazing teachers!



Esperanza Education Center

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



Raymond Bueche
District Coordinator, Special Education

Holiday Boutique

On December 17, 2024, the Adult Transition Program at Esperanza Education Center proudly held its second annual Holiday Boutique at the SVUSD District Office. This festive event featured student-led businesses, including Hope Blooms, Fine Design, Hope Café, Beadmasters, and Healthy Harvest Café.

Each business was represented by a student worker who showcased and sold their unique items. The event was a resounding success, with all proceeds directly benefiting the program and its students.

We deeply appreciate the enthusiastic support from the District Office staff, who made this event possible. Plans are already underway for next year's boutique, and we can't wait to see it grow even more!



Foothill Ranch *Elementary School*

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



Christina Stevenson
Principal

Student Council Hosts a Successful Clothing Drive and Fundraiser

Our Student Council organized a clothing drive and fundraiser, demonstrating the power of community involvement and the spirit of generosity. Students, families, and staff gathered used clothing, bedding, shoes, and bags throughout the drive. We collected

400 bags filled with items weighing over 4,000 pounds. Gently used items will be donated to those in need. Items that cannot be donated will be recycled and reused within the textile industry. The school will earn 25 cents for every pound of clothing collected. Student Council would like to use the funds to purchase new equipment for our playground. It's a win-win for all!



The success of our clothing drive wouldn't have been possible without the incredible support from our volunteers, including Student Council members, siblings, custodians, teachers, office staff, and parents.

Thank you to everyone who participated and supported this initiative!

Ralph A. Gates *Dual Language Immersion Elementary School*

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



Diana Clearwater
Principal

A Busy Winter

It has been a busy winter season at Gates with many fun activities for students and families. Parents, students and staff put on their fun holiday outfits and participated in the Elf Yourself 5 K run. Our Advocates For Language Learning (A.L.L.) parent

group organized an evening community "Posada" event at Laguna Hills High School with food, traditional Baile Folklorico dancing, community speakers, and more. Our classes got creative with a snowman making contest to decorate our beautiful quad. And those snowmen were the perfect backdrop for families and staff to gather early in the morning before school for hot "cocoa in the quad." If you want to be part of the fun Gator family, call our office and join us for a tour to learn how to register your kindergarten child in our Dual Language Immersion Program!



Glen Yermo *Elementary School*

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



Jennifer Televik
Principal

Glen Yermo Leads District in Math Growth

Glen Yermo Elementary has recorded the greatest increase in math scores across the district. The school's 2024 CAASPP test results show substantial growth, with all student subgroups, including multilingual learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities outperforming their district-wide counterparts.

Staff credit this success to a renewed focus on student engagement and collaboration within the math curriculum. Teachers have implemented strategies that actively involve students in the learning processes, encouraging problem-solving and teamwork. The growth reflects the hard work of both students and teachers.

The achievement is a point of pride for the school and a testament to the power of fostering a supportive, interactive learning environment as well as a focus on the academic success of each and every student in the school.

Mountain Lions ROAR!



La Madera *Elementary School*

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



Jennifer Gass
Principal

Family Math Night Fun

La Madera Elementary recently hosted a fun and engaging Family Math Night, organized by the school's dedicated teachers. The event aimed to strengthen the connection between families and the school's math curriculum. Parents and students gathered to participate in a variety of interactive math activities and games

designed to promote learning and collaboration. Families worked together to solve problems, explore mathematical concepts, and discover creative ways to support math learning at home. The night also included informative discussions about the school's math curriculum, giving parents a deeper understanding of how their children are being taught and how they can reinforce these lessons at home. The event fostered a sense of community, allowing families to engage in meaningful conversations about education and math while having fun. La Madera's Family Math Night was a great success, leaving everyone excited to continue exploring math together.



La Paz *Intermediate School*

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



Tiffany Harville
Principal

No Place for Hate

La Paz Intermediate is proud to announce our partnership with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to become a *No Place for Hate* school! At La Paz, we believe that creating a safe and respectful school environment is essential for academic success. That's why we're committed to fostering inclusivity and belonging for all. This year, our *No Place for Hate* committee kicked off *NPFH Pledge Week* with student

leaders presenting the pledge in classrooms. Students and staff participated by decorating pre-cut hands, symbolizing their commitment to building a welcoming, inclusive school. These hands, beautifully transformed into leaves, represent our shared vision of a school community where everyone belongs. By joining *No Place for Hate*, La Paz will integrate anti-bias and bullying prevention activities into our programs, uniting our school around the consistent message of inclusivity and respect for all. Together, we're building bridges and growing a culture of kindness!



La Tierra *Early Childhood Center*

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



Emily Arias
District
Coordinator

Creative Leaf Bowl Project at La Tierra EEC

La Tierra is thrilled to implement a new art program, led by teacher Ms. Valerie Gutierrez. For the first activity, students rolled out clay and selected their favorite leaves to press into the surface, creating nature-inspired patterns. Using the pressed designs as a guide, students carefully cut around the leaf shape, crafting what will become a beautiful leaf bowl. The clay creations will be glazed by the students and then fired in the school's new kiln. This project is a wonderful way to introduce students to the magic of clay while connecting them nature. The new art room and kiln will allow us to offer more hands-on experiences that will build their knowledge and creativity. We're excited about the amazing art projects that will emerge this year. A special thank you to Ms. Gutierrez and our Visual and Performing Arts coordinator, Sabrina Skeels, for supporting this creative endeavor.



Laguna Hills *High School*

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



Brent Dohling
Principal

Soaring High

The Hawks have been soaring high from the start of the school year. Students, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders have shown tremendous energy and collaboration, proving why Hawks Soar Above the Rest. New programs have increased

student engagement and recognition, with an 18% rise in students feeling adult support and a 22% boost in classroom focus.

In the fall, we honored military and first responders at our Hawks Hail Our Heroes event during a home football game. A successful WASC visit included a glowing report spotlighting Laguna Hills High School's culture, engagement, and access.

Success has been a theme this year. Thirty-eight LHHS students earned DELE Spanish diplomas. The LHHS Marching Band advanced to the So Cal Division 2A Finals. Athletic programs are thriving, with five winter sports currently leading their league.



Lake Forest *Elementary School*

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



Caryn McGrew
Principal

Lake Forest Student Leaders: Making a Difference Every Day

Student leadership shines brightly at Lake Forest, where our dedicated young leaders actively shape LFE's Dolphin community through various activities. Their impact extends across multiple areas: Leading School-Wide Expectation Rotations and Student of the

Month Assemblies, and coordinating philanthropic activities including a candy collection for troops and a hygiene drive where they personally deliver the items to the local OC Mission. They also help manage the monthly WAVE store, helping younger students shop while learning valuable organizational skills.

Our student leaders' commitment to school spirit is evident every Friday as they work alongside our mascot to begin the day in a positive way and boost school pride by greeting students and leading our morning announcements. Through fundraising efforts and community service, these young leaders demonstrate responsibility, initiative, and compassion, making Lake Forest a vibrant learning environment for everyone.



Linda Vista *IB Magnet Elementary School*

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



Dr. Shannon Wyatt
Principal

Reflecting on Growth: Linda Vista Magnet's Digital Portfolios in the IB PYP

At Linda Vista Magnet, students in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP) are not only learning about the world around them but also about themselves as learners. One of the most powerful tools for this self-reflection is the digital portfolio, a key component of their educational journey.

These digital portfolios offer a space for students to document their learning experiences, from classroom projects to personal achievements. As IB scholars, students engage in inquiry-based learning, and their portfolios become a collection of their thoughts, reflections, and progress throughout the year. Each piece of work included in the portfolio is an opportunity to reflect

on how they approach challenges, solve problems, and grow in their understanding of the world.

Beyond reflection, the digital portfolio serves as a memorial of their journey as IB learners. It allows students to track their development across the six transdisciplinary themes of the PYP framework, showcasing their growth in areas such as communication, critical thinking, and global citizenship. As students add entries—whether images, videos, or written reflections—they are able to look back on their learning milestones and celebrate the unique paths they've taken.

For educators and families, the digital portfolio provides valuable insight into each student's learning process, helping to foster a deeper connection to their academic and personal growth. Ultimately, these portfolios serve as a lasting record of the transformative educational experience that Linda Vista Magnet offers its IB students.

Lomarena *Elementary School*

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



Grace Cruikshank
Principal

Welcoming Community

Lomarena is truly a welcoming, and loving community, filled with passionate educators and staff, generous and talented community

members, and students who have a strong sense of belonging and respect for each other. One of the highlights of our winter season was an all-staff underground dress-up week which included a crazy hat day! In January Lomarena celebrates and learns how to put our Empathy into action through Kindness. As a result, our students are well-known throughout the community for their PRIDE in the Wild! Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, Diligence, and Empathy.



Los Alisos *Intermediate School*

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



Michael Marzilli
Principal

Cookies and Cocoa

We had a great turn out for our annual Cookies and Cocoa event. Students and their families took part in an afternoon of cookies, cocoa, games, arts and crafts, photo backdrops, and more! Lots of fun games were played and students won some great prizes. Those who attended also contributed to our school-wide canned food drive which was a huge success. Our ASB students had lots of arts and crafts for kids to create and set up holiday photo backdrops for families to take holiday photos. A special thank you to our PTSA and all of the parent volunteers that helped with the event.



Melinda Heights *Elementary School*

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



Wendie Hauschild
Principal

A Culture of Caring and Kindness

Together, Melinda Heights Elementary students, staff, and community embody the true essence of giving—proving that collaboration, compassion, and care can create lasting change. Staff members go above and beyond, guiding initiatives and creating opportunities for student leaders to engage in meaningful acts of service. Leading by example, they foster a culture of empathy and shared purpose. So far this school year, our MELT and PAL students have organized a food drive that generated 250 pounds of food benefiting a local food pantry and six large boxes of new child and adult pajamas for distribution at our district Student Marketplace. In response to the LA fires, they jumped into action and organized a gift card drive for distribution by a partnering LA school district to impacted students and families. These efforts teach valuable lessons in compassion and civic responsibility, inspiring future generations to lead with kindness.



Mission Viejo High School

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



Tricia Osborne
Principal

Mission Viejo High School Showcase!

On January 13, Mission Viejo High School hosted its exceptional annual Showcase. The event was well-attended, filled with positive energy and school spirit! The MVHS Showcase provided an opportunity for prospective students and their families to immerse themselves in the school's dynamic educational where attendees learned about the advanced academic offerings, including Honors, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and the prestigious International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Students and families had the opportunity to meet dedicated teachers, inspiring athletic coaches, amazing music directors, interact with current students, and explore the school's many programs and extracurricular programs. The excitement and pride in the air were palpable, as students and staff shared their passion for learning and collaboration! This



successful evening was a testament to the Mission Viejo High School's thriving school community, and we hope all learned why MVHS is the perfect place for their student to learn, grow, and succeed. Go Diablos!

Montevideo Elementary School

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



Lisa Palomino
Principal

Montevideo Mountaineers Making a Difference Everywhere They Go

Montevideo Elementary teaches students the importance of making a difference in someone's life and how even small acts of kindness or service can have an impact. Some acts of service Montevideo Mountaineers do at school include helping others, being empathetic to others' situations, promoting inclusion opportunities within general and special education classrooms, and showing patience and understanding. These actions foster school unity and civic responsibility. Practicing service helps students build trusting, lasting bonds with each other and the community.

Mountaineers have a passion for helping others and showing kindness. One student shared, "When we do something kind for someone else, it makes us feel good. This feeling is like a reward and

motivates us to do even more." Helping others enriches their own lives. Whether a small gesture or a big effort, every act of kindness matters. By helping others, they improve lives and multiply acts of kindness, making the world a better place.



Olivewood *Elementary School*

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



Alex Perez
Principal

Olivewood's STEAM Community Night

Olivewood Elementary recently hosted a vibrant STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) Community Night, bringing families together for an engaging evening of hands-on learning and fun. Parents, caregivers, and students participated in a variety of activities that combined creativity with critical thinking.

Students built towers using different materials, testing their durability and learning about engineering principles. Another popular station challenged participants to hypothesize and experiment with objects to determine whether they would float or sink, sparking curiosity about buoyancy and density. Families also explored the artistic side of STEAM by creating intricate tessellations, blending geometry with creativity.

The event fostered a collaborative environment where families worked together to solve problems, explore concepts, and have fun. Olivewood's STEAM Night was not only a celebration of learning but also a testament to the school's commitment to inspiring curiosity and innovation in students and their families.



Portola Hills *Elementary School*

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



Ed MacNevin
Principal

Differentiated Instruction

At Portola Hills Elementary, we prioritize differentiated instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of every student. By using flexible teaching methods, materials, and assessments, we ensure lessons are accessible to all. Incorporating visual, auditory, and hands-on strategies creates inclusive classrooms that foster collaboration,

engagement, and choice. Activities encourage students to learn from diverse perspectives and build a sense of belonging where everyone feels valued. Our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program strengthens school culture by emphasizing respect, responsibility, and positive behaviors. Through PBIS, we have reduced behavior referrals and increased student recognition. Flexible seating allows students to select their optimal learning environment, promoting focus and comfort. By integrating differentiated instruction with PBIS, we empower students to take ownership of their education and actively engage in learning. This approach ensures students thrive in a supportive and inclusive environment.



Rancho Cañada *Elementary School*

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



Jennifer Kajdasz
Principal

Rancho Cañada Hosts First Multi-Cultural Night

Rancho Cañada buzzed with excitement as it hosted its first-ever Multi-Cultural Night.

The event, which drew an impressive crowd of 250 visitors, was a vibrant celebration. With 18 booths representing various cultures from around the globe, the night was a resounding success. Each table was decorated and offered a glimpse into the traditions, foods, and crafts of different cultures. This event also provided an opportunity for participants to share and appreciate various cultural traditions through music and dance. The success of the Multi-Cultural Night was a testament to the strong sense of community within our school. Visitors and staff expressed their hopes that the Multi-Cultural Night would become

an annual tradition, growing each year to include even more cultures and experiences. The positive feedback from attendees suggested that this was just the beginning of a beloved new tradition here at Rancho Cañada.



Rancho Cañada teacher, Mrs. Megow, teaching fourth-graders about her New Zealand culture.

Rancho Santa Margarita *Intermediate School*

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



Tyler Morgan
Principal

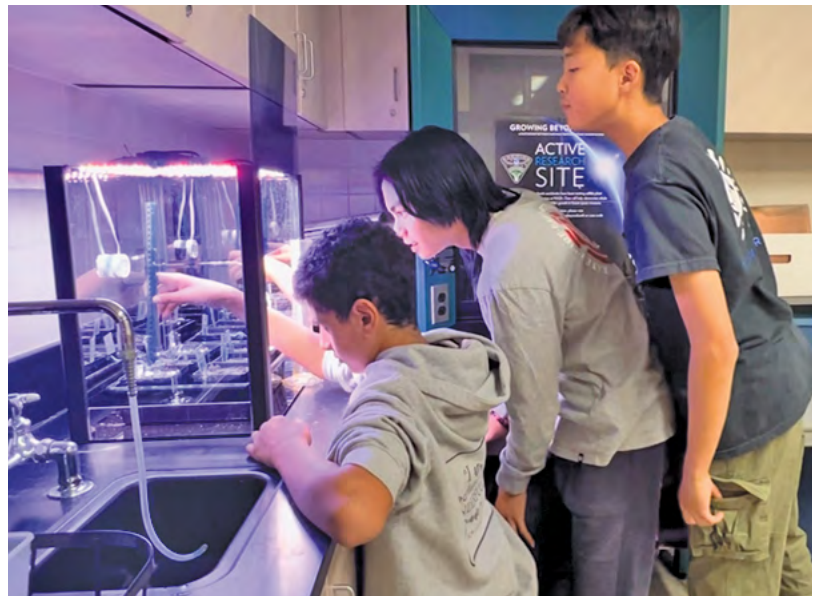
Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School's Growing Beyond Earth® Club

The Growing Beyond Earth® (GBE) Club at Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School is a collaborative program with NASA and Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. This initiative aims to expand food options for space travel by exploring optimal growing conditions for edible

plants in closed environments without sunlight or gravity. The program inspires students to contribute research-based data to help NASA determine which plant varieties are best for providing astronauts with fresh produce for long-term space exploration.

This year, students conducted experiments comparing the biomass growth of three vegetable varieties, meticulously recording humidity, temperature, and watering volume while controlling other variables like lighting and soil composition. In spring, they will regulate humidity levels to analyze its impact on plant growth.

The club's findings are presented during a spring symposium hosted by NASA. Through this hands-on research, students engage in meaningful STEM learning that prepares them for future exploration.



RSM students Mark Gorgy, Caden Bayan, and Han Lee, are measuring plants.

Robinson *Elementary School*

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



Suzy McMasters
Principal

Celebrating our Artistic Robinson Rattlers!

This year, forty-seven of our Robinson Rattlers participated in the Annual 2024 PTA Reflection Awards Program that encourages students to explore and express their creativity. With the theme of “Accepting Imperfections,” our Rattler artists were invited to embrace vulnerability and celebrate the beauty in flaws through a variety of artistic genres: including visual arts, photography, literature, music composition, dance choreography, and film production. Ten student submissions moved from winning at our school site level to the District level, of those ten, four student submissions are moving on to the county level in the areas of Dance, Photography, Literature, and Videography. Two of our scholars moving on to the county level are pictured here. Congratulations Rattlers! We are so proud of you!

Thank you, PTA for supporting our young artists!



San Joaquin *Elementary School*

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



Kristin Fowler
Principal

Thank you Tama Adams

San Joaquin Elementary School bids a heartfelt farewell to Tama Adams, our beloved Office Manager, as she embarks on her well-earned retirement. Tama has been the cornerstone of our school’s front office for the past 3 and a half years, bringing warmth, kindness, and impeccable organization to everything she did.

With a career spanning 17.5 years in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District, Tama has left an indelible mark on our community. Her friendly smile and patient demeanor made everyone—from students and parents to staff—feel welcomed and valued. She had an unparalleled ability to juggle countless tasks while maintaining calm and grace, embodying the spirit of excellence and care.

Tama, your legacy of dedication and compassion will continue to inspire us all. While we’ll deeply miss you, we wish you endless joy, relaxation, and new adventures in retirement. Congratulations, and thank you for everything!



Santiago STEAM Magnet Elementary School

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



Kristin Thomsen
Principal

Student AI Conference

Santiago Elementary 6th graders recently planned a Student AI Conference for the 5th grade class. Their culminating project-based learning assignment about technology began after they piloted an AI application specifically created for schools. Their problem statement read: “We need to throw an AI conference for Santiago 5th graders

to educate them about the possibilities of AI because kids like us will be the future leaders in AI, and there’s more to AI than they think.” They designed informative and interactive sessions, crafted lanyards, prepared name badges, and assembled swag bags for attendees. Two former Santiago STEAM students were keynote speakers, highlighting how AI has already impacted their daily lives.

Beyond this successful conference, our students participate all year long in lunchtime clubs such as the Raspberry Pi Jam, Engineering, PAL, and Battle of the Books. Meanwhile, our 6th graders will host our 3rd TEDx Youth event showcasing creativity and leadership.



Serrano Intermediate School

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



Jordan Reed
Principal

Creativity and Nature Come to Life in the Serrano Garden!

Our Emerging Multilingual Learners recently brought their talents and curiosity to the Serrano Garden. They crafted handmade ceramic worms, adding a touch

of creativity to the space. As part of their exploration of nature, students observed caterpillars transform into butterflies and released both butterflies and ladybugs into the garden, creating a vibrant and lively ecosystem. It’s wonderful to see their art and science projects making our garden a true reflection of learning and growth!



Silverado High School

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



David Gordon
Principal

Many Events

December flew by for the Silverado Eagles. The three-week calendar month meant we fit a great deal of events and celebrations in a short amount of

time! ASB hosted our annual Holiday Door Decorating competition, student decorated holiday cookies and we wore ugly sweaters the day before break. We celebrated 11 Eagles that were able to fly back to their home high schools. We're extremely proud of these Silverado students and their accomplishments.



SVUSD Virtual Academy K-12

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



Glenn Giokaris
Principal

Sahil Shah Charts His Own Course

Sahil Shah exemplifies the spirit of the SVUSD Virtual Academy's motto, "Chart Your Own Course." His accomplishments are remarkable, passing seven Advanced Placement exams and earning an impressive GPA of 5.1. By the end of this school year, Sahil will not only graduate from high school but

also complete his college general education requirements through Saddleback College in only three years. He has earned six industry-recognized certifications from institutions such as KPMG, The Wharton School, and Yale University.

Sahil has completed more than 150 internship hours with a California Assembly Member and a U.S. Congressperson, gaining hands-on experience. Sahil has made such an impression that he is now a paid staff member for California Assemblywoman Kate Sanchez.

His passion for making a positive impact is evidenced by raising \$120,000 for animal welfare and COVID-19 relief in India to successfully lobbying for improved bicyclist safety measures in Mission Viejo.



Sahil Shah, representing California Assemblywoman Kate Sanchez, speaks on her behalf to honor and recognize outstanding Marines for their service and dedication.

Trabuco *Elementary School*

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



Dr. Lindsey Gatfield
Principal

Art & Cooking under the Oak Tree

Students at Trabuco Elementary School have been enjoying art and cooking opportunities under our old oak tree. An incredible team of parent volunteers have engaged students in art projects such as painting kindness rocks for our school campus and making beaded snowflakes.

Through a Captain Planet grant and a focus on organic farming, our school received a mobile cooking cart to utilize this year. The intention of each experience is to engage students in learning about organic farm to table practices, and to give them opportunities to use organic produce in recipes that otherwise might not be familiar to them. Back in November, students repurposed pumpkins to create pumpkin waffles and enjoy freshly cut pumpkin slices. In December, students used locally grown fruits such as tangerines, pomegranates, and persimmons to make smoothies and muffins. Students learned about these organic fruits and the importance of using local resources responsibly.



Trabuco Hills *High School*

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



Alicia Foulk
Principal

THHS Music Program Highlight

Over the last few years, the Trabuco Hills Instrumental Music Program has had an amazing journey, creating experiences and memories of a lifetime for all students and families involved.

Most recently, the marching band won the Western Band Association 2024 Class 3A Championship for the 3rd consecutive year; they also hold the title of the 2022 and 2023

Grand Champions. The Symphony Orchestra has been invited to perform at the Orange County Philharmonic Society Invitational at Segerstrom for the 11th year in a row. Additionally, the entire music program was invited and will be performing at the 2026 London New Years Day Parade.

Watching the growth of the jazz band, concert band, color guard and drumline over the past few years is something special to see. The future looks limitless for the Trabuco Hills Instrumental Music Program.



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

Reflections Winners

Our Trabuco Mesa Bulldogs showed up and showed out for the annual PTA Reflections Art Program! This 50+ year-old program provides opportunities for recognition and access to the arts, which boosts student confidence and success in the arts and in life. Each year, students create original works of art in response to a student-created theme. This year's theme was "Accepting Imperfection." We had a whopping 33 students participate in this year's program, and five of those students won for their respective categories! We celebrated their accomplishments at a recent flag ceremony, which also happened to be on pajama day. We are so proud of our creative Bulldogs!



Congratulations to: Dylan Fruzza (1st place middle school film production), Maleia Paladini (2nd place intermediate film production), Amberlyn Ang (3rd place middle school literature), Emily Cary (3rd place intermediate dance choreography), and Tevey Kopin (2nd place intermediate music).

Valencia *Elementary School*

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



Brendon Morrow
Principal

We Continue to STRIVE

Situated just above La Paz Road in Laguna Hills, Valencia's student population is representative of the community it serves. Delivering instruction to Kindergarten-6th graders, we host children from a diversity of cultures. Our families are known to be hard-working, supportive, and understanding of the value of education.

All students receive general education, with groups of students with disabilities, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and English language learners having additional access to special services.

Just as our orange trees welcome all who visit our school's entrance, our faculty and community have embraced those who come to us by residence or by choice. While innovative, impactful, and purposefully planned instruction has traditionally helped yield outstanding assessment scores, our staff continues to take steps of examining our practices to recognize additional levels for improvements. We are proud of our historical success, and we continue to STRIVE to build a bright future for our students.

