

School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation



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Buena Park School District

EDUCATION



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Governing Board



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District and Community Celebrate Gilbert's State-of-the-Art Early Learning Center



Dr. Julienne Lee
Superintendent

I often reflect on the extraordinary Buena Park community that continues to uplift our students with commitment, vision, and unparalleled support. The ribbon-cutting ceremony for Gilbert's new Early Learning Center sparked another such moment of reflection. This beautiful facility is set to become the centerpiece of our preschool program and to significantly enhance early learning opportunities for our families.

Sitting on the west side of Gilbert's campus, it introduces nine new preschool classrooms, a dedicated teacher workroom, and an administrative building. The Early Learning Center will also feature a Dual Language Immersion program in Spanish to feed into Gilbert's DLI kindergarten program, building strong bilingual and biliteracy skills while honoring each student's native language and cultural identity. But this facility and these programs would not exist without



Gilbert principal Leslie Chavez and Community Schools Coordinator Jackie Gallardo-Hoffmaster pose in front of new Early Learning Center.



Superintendent Dr. Julienne Lee, Governing Board member Brenda Estrada (partly obscured), Governing Board President Pro Tem Jerry Frutos, Gilbert principal Leslie Chavez, Administrator of Early and Expanded Learning Mary Beckelheimer, Governing Board member Rhodia Shead, and Governing Board President Jason Chong cut ribbon for Early Learning Center.

the dedication of this community. While the funding for this project was made possible through the California Preschool, TK, and Full-Day Kindergarten Facilities Grant, this particular grant required matching funds that were sourced from the Measure B bond that you, our Buena Park families and neighbors, made possible. Thank you, all of you, for making this possible. Thank you for the work we've done together and the work that waits for us on the horizon. It's an honor to serve as your superintendent.



Governing Board member Brenda Estrada, Governing Board member Rhodia Shead, Governing Board President Pro Tem Jerry Frutos, Gilbert principal Leslie Chavez, Superintendent Dr. Julienne Lee, and Governing Board President Jason Chong listen to a speech from Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva.

Governing Board

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Whitaker Earns Golden Bell for Innovative “Math Belongs To Everyone” Program

The BPSD Governing Board is proud to share that Whitaker Elementary School’s “Math Belongs to Everyone” program has earned CSBA’s Golden Bell award, an honor reserved for the state’s most outstanding programs. This award speaks to the extraordinary vision of a truly innovative teacher — Suzanne Huerta — and her goal of elevating the mathematical thinking of all learners, particularly students with disabilities. “Math Belongs to Everyone” is an approach to math pedagogy that challenges traditional narratives about who is “good” at math. Rooted in Cognitively Guided Instruction, this program opens doors for students with disabilities and increases engagement and test scores by using visual and personalized math challenges, family partnerships, and asset-based IEP goals.



Math partners in Suzanne Huerta’s class tackle a real-world question together.

student-centered design. It is featured in *Rethinking Disability and Mathematics* by Rachel Lambert, has welcomed CGI experts from UCSB and SDSU to observe, and has been showcased at major conferences including CMC, NCSM, and the UCLA Math Project.

In the end, this Golden Bell award honors a truly transformative program that fosters meaningful math learning for students with disabilities, aligning with Whitaker’s mission to inspire high achievement and open up opportunities for our students.

Please join me in congratulating Whitaker Elementary School and Suzanne Huerta for this outstanding achievement.



Suzanne Huerta works with a student during math class.

“Math Belongs to Everyone” reimagines classrooms as inclusive, story-rich spaces where students build mathematical understanding through curiosity and conversation. Daily questions are personalized to reflect student interests, fostering deeper engagement and joyful learning. Signature family events, like “Bring Your Family to Math Class,” welcome families into the learning process, building confidence at home and strengthening school-community connections. The program’s visionary approach has gained recognition beyond the district for its creative,



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Mary Murray
President

Buena Park School District's Education Foundation Funds Teacher Passion Projects

Every third grader at Emery Elementary School has a treat in store this spring: A field trip to the La Mirada Theater to attend a live performance based on the book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The students will first read the book and conduct character studies, weighing the extent to which the actions of individual characters shape the plot and themes of the story. They will then board a bus, drive to La Mirada, and immerse



Whitaker students study the board carefully in a game of chess.

themselves in the magic of theater, expanding their ideas about the book to a whole new level. For many students, this will also be their first time experiencing live theater.

Teachers across the district have the opportunity to

apply for these grants through the Buena Park Education Foundation by sharing their passion project goals (and dollar amount requirements). For those selected, the grant covers the costs of supplies and training and makes possible the projects that schools can't ordinarily fund.

Two other wishes that were answered by the Foundation this year include individual student headphones for Pendleton Elementary School and educational games for a second grade classroom at Whitaker Elementary School. The Education Foundation uses its funds to fulfill grant applications, provide jerseys for every student participating in the Superintendent's Soccer Cup, and supply those "extras" that add to the quality and joy of the educational experience at BPSD. The Education Foundation's fundraising is largely dependent on Quartermania (a bidding-style game night funded with quarters that yields prizes for participants), along with special Giving Tuesdays and Open Donation or memorial donation fundraisers.



Students play a hand of "Uno" during a Global Play Day at Whitaker Elementary School.

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Cerritos at Heritage Park

Wednesday, April 1, 2026 - Saturday, June 6, 2026
Wednesdays 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM
& Saturdays 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Anaheim at Sage Park

Saturday, April 4, 2026 - Saturday, May 30, 2026
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Boys and Girls ages 7-15

Registration price includes a t-shirt



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Late: \$200 until 04/01/26

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Community Partnerships Expand Reach and Offerings for Monthly Farmers Market

Buena Park School District's Mobile Food Pantry provides fresh produce and staple food items at no cost to district families, serving approximately 1,000 individuals each month at both Buena Park Middle School and Whitaker Elementary School. Multiple partners work together to make this community outreach possible, starting with Second Harvest Food Bank, which supplies the fresh produce and staples each month. Bracken's Kitchen, a new community partner, brings a food truck and hosts a free hot meal for everyone in attendance, and they are hoping to add a takeaway frozen meal option for attendees in the coming months. Buena Park Middle School's FFA students, under the leadership of Shelley Andros, also distribute produce that they have harvested from their own BPMS gardens and greenhouse, as well as assisting families with boxing and carrying. Finally, representatives from the St. Jude/Providence "Move More, Eat Healthy" program bring a table and a team of 10 volunteers to promote healthy living and nutritious practices.



Representatives from the St. Jude/Providence "Move More, Eat Healthy" program pose before the Mobile Food Bank begins.



Volunteers arrange fresh cabbage before the mobile food pantry begins



Bracken's Kitchen brings its food truck to the Mobile Food Pantry to serve a hot meal to everyone attending the Mobile Food Bank.



Jeselle Mata
Principal

Corey Students Expand Their Knowledge of the Arts to Include Textiles

The Fiber Arts and Textiles after-school enrichment class at Corey Elementary School is silent, its students brimming with concentration. Two baskets overflowing with colorful skeins of yarn sit centrally-located on a table, and students periodically visit the baskets to select an alternate color before returning to their seats in the cafeteria. The students have been given the option of a variety of projects at a range of difficulty levels, but several students have tackled the complex art of crochet and are on their way to mastering a single crochet stitch. This nine-week class is taught by textile experts from Musical Minds Academy, an organization dedicated not only to music programs but also to specialized arts programs, based on the belief that “music and arts are fundamental systems akin to language.” Watching these students loop the yarn around their fingers and manipulate their crochet hooks with a deft up and down motion of their wrists, it’s easy to see that learning how to produce certain types of stitches and designs to complete a project is akin to coding robots to complete certain movements or summoning particular notes from a violin.



Two students learn single stitch crochet as part of the Fiber Arts and Textiles after-school program at Corey.



Student gets started on her single stitch crochet project.



Student gets help from instructor with crochet project.



Instructor helps students with two different fiber arts projects.

Charles G. Emery *Elementary School*

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Rebecca Taylor
Principal

Students Celebrate the First Annual Cultural Heritage Day at Emery Elementary

The excitement was palpable on Cultural Heritage Day at Emery Elementary School as lines of students marched out of their classrooms towards the blacktop assembly area dressed in the colorful attire of their respective cultures. As the lines of students intersected one another, students admired each other's outfits, adjusted bows and fasteners, and posed for pictures. The idea

for this event first came from fourth and fifth-graders on a survey from the school's PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) team, which was looking for ways to make school spirit events more engaging. Parents and teachers joined in the fun, dressing in attire that celebrated their cultural backgrounds, and everyone met up to kick off the day with a Jubilee awards assembly. Back in their classrooms, students had the opportunity to share a little about their cultural backgrounds and identities with their peers and to celebrate one another's traditions.



Four students at the assembly talk about the background behind their cultural attire.



Student poses on her way to the Cultural Heritage Day assembly.



The youngest students at Emery share the excitement as they get ready for the assembly.



Students walk together to an assembly as part of Cultural Heritage Day.

Carl E. Gilbert *Elementary School*

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Leslie Chavez
Principal

Preschool and Kindergarten Dual Language Immersion Program Thrives at Gilbert Elementary School

Students in Maestra Caroline Jimenez's Dual Language Immersion (DLI) kindergarten class at Gilbert Elementary School watch carefully as she writes the letter "F" on a flipchart. They follow suit by drawing their own "F" in the air and on the carpet and then thinking of words that begin with the "ffff" sound. Maestra Jimenez is animated and expressive, and although she speaks entirely in Spanish for this portion of the class, the students follow along as her gestures and clues offer meaning. Questions asked in English receive a response in Spanish that employs a mindful combination of words and charades that leave no doubt as to her meaning. As a class, using photo



Small groups offer students additional support during their collaborative time.



Students work together during an alphabet lesson in Spanish.

cards as prompts, they brainstorm words that begin with the letter "F" and add them to the flip chart: feliz (happy), fonética (phonics), and fósil (fossil) all join the list. Maestra Jimenez does not shy away from challenging vocabulary, and the students soak up each word and idea. One girl points to herself: "Francesca!" she says, delighted with the discovery that her name, like these words, starts with an "F." After receiving direction in Spanish, the students make their way from the carpet to the tables, open their pencil boxes, and begin writing the letter that they have been studying all morning. Chatting quietly, some in Spanish, some in English, the students work together to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism.



Students take turns sharing words that begin with an "F" sound.



Maestra Jimenez helps a student with a lesson on the letter "F."

Mabel L. Pendleton *Elementary School*

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Dr. Loriann Leota
Principal

Pendleton Elementary School's Run Club Completes the Last Mile of an Entire Marathon

Members of Pendleton Elementary School's run club, under the direction of physical education teacher Jeff Krucli-Mukanos, logged 25 miles (almost a marathon!) in games and running over 10 weeks and then completed the final mile together at a school-wide celebration, cheered on by family and friends. The final one-mile course had been marked



Homemade signs and interactive sign boards keep the momentum going.



Principal Dr. Loriann Leota and physical education teacher Jeff Krucli-Mukanos pause for a photo as the running event gets started.

with colorful cones, and students holding signs found spots along the running loop that wound through the fields and classroom corridors of the school. The run club participants walked under the giant blow-up "START" arch and up to the starting line one grade at a time, with Coach Krucli-Mukanos counting down to "GO" and sending them off in waves by grade. One by one, the runners completed the final mile of the marathon and accomplished with pride something few can claim.



Students smile as they begin the mile course that will result in a completed marathon.



Student proudly shows off her bib number as a participant in the run club marathon event.



Partway through the run, participants are still giving 100% effort.

James A. Whitaker *Elementary School*

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Stephanie Williamson
Principal

Whitaker Elementary School's Roblox After-School Enrichment Teaches Video Game Design

Whitaker Elementary School students, through a partnership with Creative Brain Learning, are designing their own video games as part of an after-school enrichment class that uses an application called Roblox Studio. This unique platform offers students an accessible

introduction to game design by laying a foundation of if/then logic and sequencing. By following particular steps and flow charts, students at all experience levels can learn how to design, build, and test a custom video game. The class itself maintains a quiet hum of activity, with students focused on their own game builds or showing a neighbor a strand of their game that they just completed and tested. Every now and then, a hand shoots up in the air, looking for assistance or validation from the instructor circulating around the room. "Yes!" exclaims a girl who successfully completed her most recent game sequence. Her classmates look up and smile and then quickly return to their work so that they, too, can complete this piece of the project. This after-school series is taught by Creative Brain Learning, which offers project-based



Instructor assists student through a tricky part of her game design.

classes that employ a blend of creative and technical skills, and the Roblox system of video game design fits this model of innovation and hands-on engagement.



Student works on designing and building her own video game through Roblox Studio.



Student pauses in her work to smile and consider her next steps.

Gordon H. Beatty *Middle School*

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Dr. Joaquin Valdez
Principal

Beatty Middle School's Academic Pentathlon Team Wins Second Place at Nationals

Beatty Middle School's sixth-grade Academic Pentathlon team placed first in Orange County, second in the state of California, and now second at nationals in the United States Academic Pentathlon tournament in San Antonio, Texas.

This rigorous academic competition challenges students across five subject areas: fine arts, literature, mathematics, science, and social science, and each year, qualifying teams of students across the country in sixth through eighth grades study and test in these subjects within an interdisciplinary framework focused on a central theme. The topic was "Our Changing Climate," and the students underwent examinations and tests in each core area through this particular lens. In addition to a second-place overall trophy, Beatty students brought home 10 individual awards, including a

first-place medal in literature, first, second, and third-place wins in science, and third-place awards in mathematics and social science. They were also only two points away from taking first place in the Super Quiz over the five-time national champions! The event was held at the San Antonio Marriott Riverwalk, part of a premier academic program developed by the United States Academic Decathlon. Congratulations to the Beatty Academic Pentathlon team!



Beatty's Academic Pentathlon team poses with a banner at the Nationals tournament.



Beatty team members prepare well into the night in advance of the Nationals tournament.



An excited Nationals team shakes off the jitters before the Nationals tournament in San Antonio, Texas.



Jay Beckelheimer
Principal

Buena Park Middle School Ag Science Cultivates More Than Produce

The greenhouse at Buena Park Middle School is awash in color, with 600 vibrant marigold plants filling the 24' x 48' space and its rows of agricultural tables. Inside, a team of Shelley Andros's sixth grade ag science students prepares flower pots to distribute to families at the community farmer's market in the gym later that afternoon. Off to one side, Andros shows three students how

to pot mint, curly parsley, and kale plants so they can supervise their peers at three planting stations, and outside in the chicken coop, another group feeds the chickens and discusses the egg-handling license that they expect to receive in January. A few stragglers tend their own 4' x 4' plots of land that currently feature winter crops of broccoli rabe, broccoli, and collard greens. One of the secret ingredients to this flourishing ag science program is the care with which it has extended its roots into the Buena Park community. After school that day, these same students, this time sporting FFA shirts, distribute their

home-grown vegetables to families who attend the farmers' market held in the gym each month in partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank. The produce—cultivated, harvested, and distributed by the students—includes summer crops (peppers, tomatoes, basil, watermelon, zucchini, corn, and pumpkins) and winter crops (broccoli varieties, collard and mustard greens, cabbage, parsley, cilantro, and carrots). Andros designs her curriculum to link environmental stewardship, food systems, and cultural identity, which means the students and community play an important role in shaping the selection of crops. Ingredients that they use in their own cooking at home, such as peppers, cilantro, and tomatoes, become centerpieces in the BPMS garden. In this case, Andros found the perfect tie-in for the October Farmers' Market: Everyone in attendance took home one of the 600 potted marigold plants in honor of Dia de los Muertos. "In my tradition," explains David, now an eighth grader in the ag science program, "we make a trail of marigold petals from the front door to the ofrenda to help the spirits find their way home." This year, these vibrant flowers came from the BPMS garden.



Students pot mint, curly parsley, and kale plants as part of their sixth grade ag science class.



Rows of succulent plants await distribution inside the greenhouse.



Ag Science student poses with a chicken as he feeds it and tends to the chicken coop.



Teacher Shelley Andros poses with students and marigold plants at the farmers' market.



Snapshot of students in the greenhouse as they receive their directions for the class period.

Buena Park Preschools

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Mary Beckelheimer
*Administrator
Early and
Expanded Learning*

Buena Park Learning Center Puts Learning at the Heart of Play

Mornings at the Buena Park Learning Center offer preschool students a range of play options, but each has learning at its core and each contributes to a curriculum that is designed to prepare them for kindergarten. This high scope framework provides a balance between child-initiated learning and teacher-guided instruction, with

pre-academics and social-emotional skills at the heart of every activity. “Let’s walk to the park,” invites one student, who proceeds to describe a field with horses and swings. “This is the table for lunch, and this is where the horses live,” he adds, positioning blocks on the carpet. During this hour of unscheduled free time, children engage in counting and stacking blocks, building cities with legos, reading books, and experimenting with water and light, unaware that such active, hands-on exploration is laying the groundwork for more formal math and reading instruction.



A budding puppeteer delights in a basket of puppets.



Student holds up a circle and a pentagon.



Student counts the number of gems on each disc and determines which disc has the most.



Student stacks discs and looks around for more to add to the tower.



Concentration helps this student add one more block to a precarious stack.