

School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation



Volume 1, Issue 1

November 2024

Buena Park School District

EDUCATION



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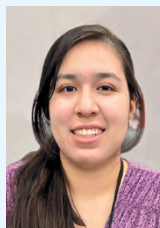
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BPSD Governing Board Puts Students Front and Center

Governing Board meetings look a little different at the Buena Park School District, where each meeting features a school and the voices of its students. Whether marching in with a full drumline, performing an excerpt from Finding Nemo, or offering a sample of award-winning oratory from a recent speech competition, BPSD students kick off each Board meeting with a (boisterous) reminder of why everyone is there. The schools also highlight a variety of partners and perspectives, with parents and teachers sharing the microphone with students to discuss signature programs and present a vibrant, authentic look at that school's experience.



Gilbert Elementary School principal Leslie Chavez holds the microphone for a student speaker.



Pendleton Elementary School students perform a song and dance for the Governing Board.



Student steps forward to join the BPSD Governing Board presentation with encouragement from Pendleton Elementary School principal Dr. Loriann Leota.



Buena Park Middle School's orchestra gets ready for their Board meeting performance.



New Beatty Middle School cheer squad brings energy to the Board meeting.

Golden Bell Shines Spotlight on Intersectionality of CTE Programs



Dr. Julienne Lee
Superintendent

The FFA/Ag Science program at Buena Park Middle School has earned CSBA's prestigious Golden Bell award this year, and this honor highlights the significance of intersectionality in creating strong Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and

building families and community partners into the foundation of the program.

Some of this foundation relies on community grants. The nine raised planter beds and newly-installed 24' x 48' greenhouse where students cultivate vegetables and flowers are funded through Whole Kids Foundation and Boswell Urban grants. The incoming solar-powered, water-efficient irrigation system was made possible through the Bright Futures grant from OC Power Authority. And a three-bin composter, courtesy of an Action for Healthy Kids grant, uses food scraps from the culinary arts program and sawdust from the industrial arts program to help create compost to feed the ag science crops.

This cross-over between the FFA program, culinary arts, and industrial arts is only the beginning of the intersectionality of the CTE courses at Buena Park Middle School. The FFA program also teams up with culinary arts and CalFresh Healthy Living to teach students to prepare nutritious meals using recipes that feature the FFA program's fresh produce. Industrial arts students recently pulled out their tools and learned how to install



Applied arts students at BPMS install shelves for the horticulture/ FFA greenhouse in another example of cross-disciplinary partnership.

the shelving for the ag science greenhouse. The new Ag Center to be built this coming year will likewise include a chicken coop built by industrial arts students and art installations created by visual arts students. In addition, the middle school FFA program comprises a CTE Pathway that is fully aligned with Buena Park High School's agriculture and technology programs. And to complete the circle, teacher Shelley Andros plans to use the greenhouse to provide houseplant, succulent, and vegetable transplants to develop

the gardens of the district's five elementary schools.

Ultimately, this team-based philosophy allows programs to plant roots in the Buena Park community. In concert with Second Harvest Food Bank, students distribute their home-grown vegetables (tomatoes and herbs in the summer; collards, kale, cabbage, lettuce, beets, and broccoli in the winter) to their peers at the BPMS Farmer's Market "Grab-n-Go" as they get on the bus after school. And for the first time, students have planted marigolds in the raised beds in the hope that by Dia de Los Muertos, they'll be able to take home flowers, allowing families who celebrate this holiday to leave a trail of marigold petals from the door to the ofrenda using brightly-colored petals from the BPMS garden.

This program truly speaks to the power of partnership and collaboration in opening up incredible opportunities for our students and our community.



BPMS families are invited to take home plants and produce at Open House.



BPMS welcomes district and city dignitaries to the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the FFA/Ag Science greenhouse.

BPSD Education Foundation

6885 Orangethorpe Ave., Buena Park, CA 90620 • 714/522-8412 • www.bpsd.us



Mary Murray
President

BPSD's Education Foundation Funds School Passion Projects and District Jerseys

Every fourth grader at Emery Elementary School will soon learn coding through a new robotics program funded by the Buena Park School District Education Foundation. Gilbert Elementary School's PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports) program now boasts fun STEM equipment and supplies that provide additional excitement and incentives to students.

Teachers across the district have the opportunity to apply for these grants through the Foundation by sharing their passion project goals and wishes (and dollar amount requirements). Approximately 10 projects receive funding each year, covering the costs of supplies and training and making programs possible that schools can't ordinarily fund. "Foundation grants, and funding these great ideas, are our way of making sure our teachers can continue to do what they love and keep their passions alive," says Debbie Clark, a member of the Education Foundation. "It's also what's best for kids."

Like Ms. Clark, many Foundation members over its 12-year history have been employed by the district and want to contribute their time, energy, and love back to the schools and students. Retired past employees, from management to classified staff, largely comprise the current Board. This 501(c)(3) non-profit uses its funds to fulfill grant applications, provide jerseys and t-shirts for every student participating in the Superintendent's Soccer Cup and District Choir Festival, 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.



Emery teacher Jennifer Ferrara distributes BPSD Choir Festival t-shirts to all choir participants.



Gilbert students show off their t-shirts as they perform in the 2024 District Choir Festival.



Teams high-five after a game in the Superintendent's Soccer Cup (and model their jerseys from the BPSD Education Foundation).



Gilbert and Pendleton soccer players sport their jerseys in the Superintendent's Soccer Cup.

District Student Leadership Program has Roots in the Community

Principal for a Day is a unique annual event that combines district community partnerships with student leadership development. For this event, each school randomly selects a student from a list of candidates who have positively impacted their school with kindness and other positive attributes, and that student has the opportunity to be a leader for the day and perform tasks alongside the principal. Concurrently, Buena Park School District reaches out to local civic leaders who are actively engaged in improving the Buena Park community through service to see if they would

like to be student mentors. Those who sign on are asked to consider the essential qualities of leadership and any advice or encouragement they might offer a young Principal for a Day who is embarking on their first leadership experience. The community mentors write a letter or record a video for the student principals to share these thoughts and lessons, and their letters and videos (along with in-person visits) are waiting for the students at the start of their special day, along with fun swag bags packed with district and community goodies.



BPPD Police Chief Frank Nunes shares a book with Corey Elementary School's student Principal for a Day.



Student Principal for a Day visits a classroom on his rounds with Whitaker Elementary School principal Stephanie Williamson.



BPSD Governing Board President Pro Tem Jason Chong pins a district pin on the student Principal for a Day's lapel at Emery Elementary School.



Buena Park Middle School principal Jay Beckelheimer shakes the student Principal for a Day's hand as they head into a meeting together.

Buena Park School District and City of Buena Park Team Up with Community Park

Whitaker Park exemplifies a unique partnership between Buena Park School District and the City of Buena Park. At the recent ribbon-cutting ceremony, BPSD Superintendent Dr. Julianne Lee and Buena Park City Manager Aaron France shared the stage and welcomed Buena Park families and local and state dignitaries to the beautiful new space. Whitaker Park features a basketball/pickleball court, fitness circuit, quarter-mile track, play structure, and outdoor classroom, and ceremony attendees joyfully ran, jumped, and climbed their way through the

morning after the more formal part of the ceremonies had concluded. Under the terms of the partnership, Whitaker Elementary School students will enjoy the park during school hours, and the community will have access to it on weekends, holidays, and non-school days. As Dr. Lee notes, “This beautiful space showcases the power of working together. It began as an idea, a conversation between the city and the school district, and it came together over the past year. This park is a legacy for our families and a green, vibrant space where our community can thrive.”



Superintendent Dr. Julianne Lee and Buena Park City Manager Aaron France serve as co-emcees for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.



Students play a lively game of “HORSE” on the new basketball court.



Student climbs to the top of the new play structure.



Two students take turns pushing one another on the swings.



Jeselle Mata
Principal

Students Become Chemistry Detectives in Corey Science Program

A basic lesson in chemical reactions becomes an engaging mystery in the hands of Wendy Roxas and her fifth graders at Corey Elementary School. Carrying precarious trays of dixie cups across the room, representatives from each lab group arrange their supplies and then examine three sets of four different sample cups with four mysterious compounds in them. The challenge: to add water, vinegar, and iodine to the three sets of substances and observe what the chemical reactions reveal about the ingredients within. Students measure water into the first set of four cups and vinegar into the second set, and Ms. Roxas circles around with a giant dropper full of iodine to administer this reactant to the final set. “Corn starch,” exclaims a student before the rest of the team put their heads down and begin furiously writing in their lab notebooks. This hands-on science program has proven yet again that science and detective work go hand in hand – and that both are pretty fun.



Students gather around Ms. Wendy Roxas as she administers iodine to the final set of dixie cups.



One lab mate adds vinegar to a cup and the other watches closely to see what happens.



A student stirs the reactant into the compound and watches the chemical reaction that ensues.

Charles G. Emery *Elementary School*

8600 Somerset St., Buena Park, CA 90621 • 714/521-5134 • emery.bpsd.us



Rebecca Taylor
Principal

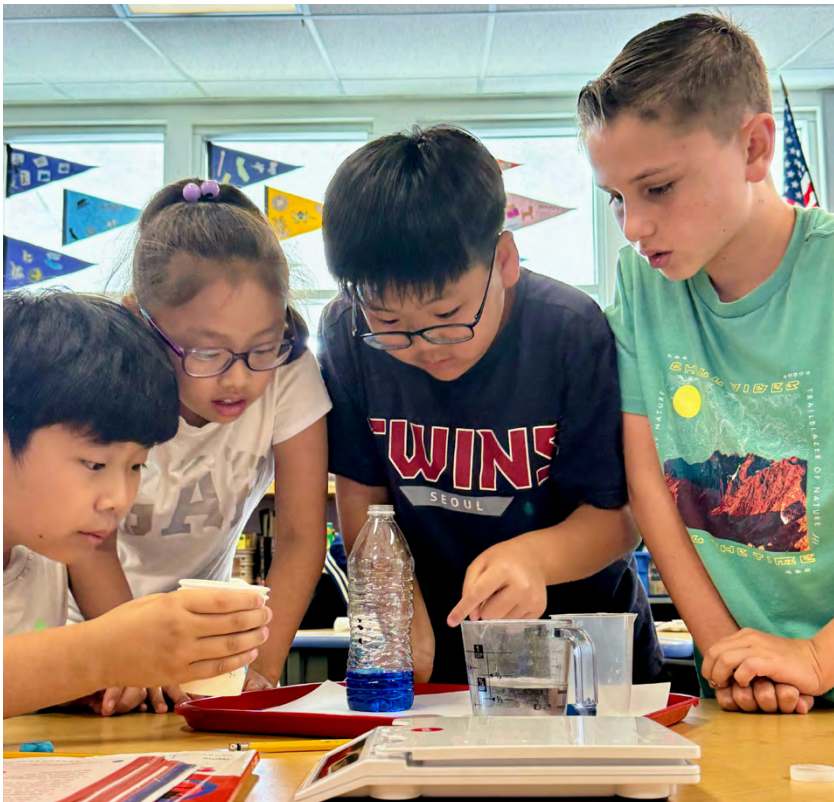
Expanding STEAM

Room 37 at Emery Elementary School is humming as Jennifer Schell's fifth graders carefully weigh and measure ingredients and layer them into an empty water bottle. Today's lab features students creating lava lamps in teams, observing the resulting chemical reactions, and writing their findings in their workbooks. And lava lamps are only the beginning.

Emery is in the process of expanding its STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) program to equip students not only with the problem-solving mindset needed to approach challenges with creativity and collaboration, but also with the critical thinking skills that will help define future successes. "These hands-on experiences encourage students to dream big and innovate boldly," says principal Rebecca Taylor, "and they help cultivate a generation of thinkers, creators, and problem-solvers who will contribute positively to our community and beyond." In Ms. Schell's classroom, students discover that bubbling and fizzing create gas and a new substance. From robotics to environmental science to lava lamps, the Emery STEAM program is clearly on the move.



Two students work in tandem to layer ingredients into their water bottle lava lamp.



A team of students examines the chemical reactions underway in their lava lamp.



Student screws the cap firmly onto the water bottle before giving it a good shake.

Carl E. Gilbert *Elementary School*

7255 8th St., Buena Park, CA 90621 • 714/522-7281 • gilbert.bpsd.us



Leslie Chavez
Principal

AVID Supports all Students at Gilbert

Students in Caroline Jimenez’s kindergarten class at Gilbert Elementary School learn what it means to be organized as part of their daily routine. “Today, we’ll start with our morning meeting and then have our phonics lesson,” begins Ms. Jimenez, pointing to signs with words and pictures as the students follow along, rapt with attention. At any time of the day, they know exactly what they’re supposed to be doing and what will come next. The AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program is designed to close opportunity

gaps and prepare all students to succeed in whatever college or career path they choose. The foundation of this program includes professional learning and resources that help teachers elevate student achievement and engagement through targeted student academic support. AVID’s scaffolding covers organization, study skills, communication, and self-advocacy, and at Gilbert, the philosophy is applied in every classroom for every scholar. In Ms. Jimenez’s class, the students move on to their phonics lesson, learning about the letter “B” through instructional approaches championed by AVID, including smaller “strategy groups” that help reinforce more challenging letter concepts.



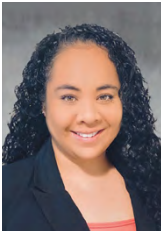
Students work together to pair letter cards with pictures of animals that begin with that letter.



Students raise their hands with a quiet finger in front of their lips, ready to offer an answer.

Mabel L. Pendleton *Elementary School*

7101 Stanton Ave., Buena Park, CA 90621 • 714/521-8568 • pendleton.bpsd.us



Dr. Loriann Leota
Principal

International Baccalaureate

Students at Pendleton Elementary School love singing and dancing during their weekly Spanish lessons from Maestra Park, who is also the Coordinator for the school's International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme. The IBPYP offers a concept-based, interdisciplinary approach to education that puts students at the center of their learning and encourages creativity, collaboration, and inquiry. Pendleton was officially authorized as an International Baccalaureate World School in January 2024 – one of only eight other IB Primary Years Programmes in Orange County. As part of the IB program, Pendleton committed to boosting its foreign language teaching to provide in-depth intercultural learning, and they selected Spanish to fulfill this requirement. Maestra Park rolls her portable cart to each classroom, bringing all levels of conversation and singing to every student, grades K - 5. These weekly Spanish classes provide fun, interactive lessons that help students develop respect for other cultures along the way.



Student dances to a Spanish language song.



Student raises her hand: She knows the answer in Spanish.



Maestra Park helps a student write labels in Spanish on a worksheet.

James A. Whitaker *Elementary School*

8401 Montana Ave., Buena Park, CA 90621 • 714/521-9770 • whitaker.bpsd.us



Stephanie Williamson
Principal

New Digital Club Launches at Whitaker

A fifth-grade student wearing a giant backpack and a smile hurries into room 5 at Whitaker Elementary School, the district's Communication and Media Arts school. In one motion, she drops her backpack to the floor, swoops up a video camera, and begins to walk around the classroom using the viewfinder as her guide. She and a handful of fourth and fifth-grade students comprise the proud membership of Whitaker's

Digital Club, a new student group responsible for taking photos and videos of special events on campus, writing and recording accompanying news blurbs, and pushing these stories out to the school community. Advisors Angela Cho, Carolyn Reutyak, and Tia Rubio believe that students should be the experts and owners of each project. Accordingly, Ms. Cho shows the students how to put in new SD cards, but they install the cards themselves, and it is the students' filming ideas that comprise the month's call sheet. Today, they record a welcome message from the new Student Council president in front of a green screen, and they have plans to cover the ice cream social and conduct interviews about the Character Trait of the month.



Two students work together to attach a microphone.



Ms. Angela Cho shows a student how to install a new SD card.



Student films another student giving a report in front of a green screen.

Gordon H. Beatty *Middle School*

8201 Country Club Dr., Buena Park, CA 90621 • 714/523-1160 • beatty.bpsd.us



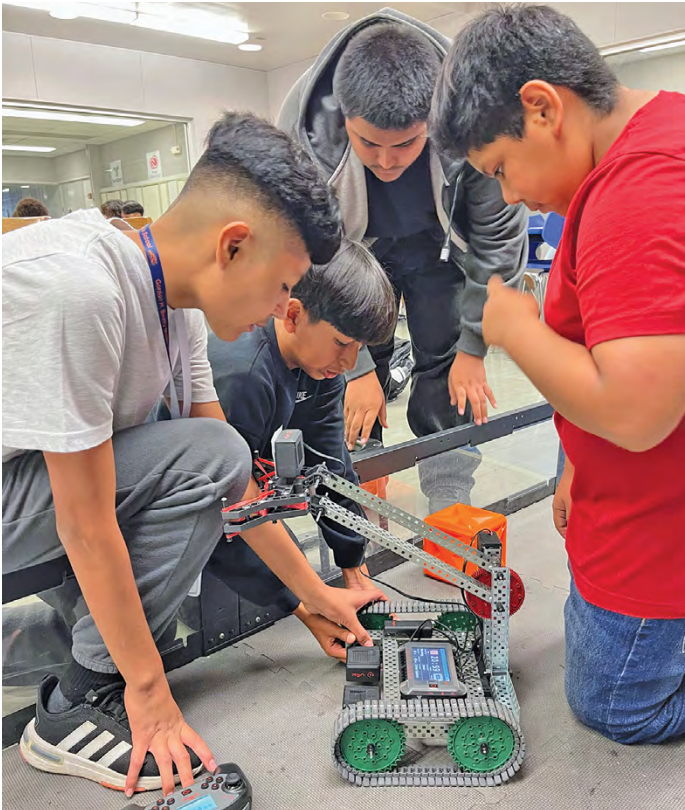
Dr. Joaquin Valdez
Principal

Partnership with CAM Edu adds Advanced Robotics and 3D Modeling to Course Offerings

Beatty Middle School's new partnership with CAM Edu, a leader in STEAM education, is taking the Beatty robotics program to the next level, adding specialized robotics and 3D modeling classes to Beatty's course offerings. With a focus on project-based learning that includes coding workshops and virtual reality, this program's high-energy, collaborative atmosphere requires students to solve problems and think critically as a team. In the real-world Robotics Rescue Challenge, students design, build, and program robots to navigate unpredictable terrain and rescue a 3D-printed block, and they learn to remotely control their robots through mounted cameras. The 3D Puzzle Challenge begins with lessons on spatial awareness, geometric modeling, tolerance calculation, and Boolean operations so that students can create complex shapes from simple shapes. For the challenge itself, students use leading-edge software to develop designs and create digital models, discovering the importance of technical accuracy and precision in 3D design along the way.



Students work together on wheel design.



Robotics team preps robot for another try after debugging it to improve performance.



CAM Edu instructor assists student with 3D design project.

Buena Park *Middle School*

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Jay Beckelheimer
Principal

FFA/AG Science Program at Buena Park Middle School Earns Golden Bell Award

Buena Park Middle School's FFA (Future Farmers of America) program has been awarded CSBA's Golden Bell Award, an honor reserved for the most outstanding programs across the state. This award recognizes a visionary program—the first middle school FFA program in Orange County and one of just 18 in CA—where students practice the science of sustainability through

four intensive classes that elevate the AG sciences into modern AG practice. Students study plant classification, environmental stewardship, and renewable energy technology, and then they roll up their sleeves and cultivate every square inch of the nine raised planter beds and newly-installed 24' x 48' greenhouse made possible by the Whole Kids Foundation and Boswell Urban grants. Their projects range from planting and harvesting crops to installing a new irrigation system funded by a Bright Futures grant, complete with solar-powered controllers and water-efficient irrigation stations. Teacher Shelley Andros's whole-child approach also integrates families and the community into its scaffolding, giving students a first-hand view of the ripple effects of agriculture on the human landscape as well as on the land itself.



Teacher Shelley Andros guides student through the planting process.



Two students harvest black-eyed susan flowers and tie back some of the foliage.



Two students prepare the soil for vegetable seedling plants.

Buena Park Preschools

8201 Country Club Dr., Buena Park, CA 90621 • 714/523-1160 • bplc.bpsd.us



Mary Beckelheimer
*Administrator
Early and
Expanded Learning*

Play-Based Learning in BPSD Preschools Offers Something for Everyone

High-quality early education is a key component to future academic success, and Buena Park School District preschools set young learners up to achieve by building academic language through experiential, play-based learning. The Guided Language Acquisition and Development (GLAD) system also supports language development by focusing on

visual support and color coding to help students understand concepts and acquire vocabulary. Buena Park Learning Center, along with preschools at Corey, Emery, Gilbert, Pendleton, and Whitaker Elementary Schools, provide Buena Park families with options that include full or part-day preschool and subsidized or tuition-based preschool, depending on the location. The district is also expanding its early childhood offerings with a new Child Development Center next to Gilbert Elementary School, slated for completion in the coming year.



A student develops math skills by using dice and manipulatives.



Students work together to study bridges and make observations.



Drums make a great entry into a lesson about music and rhythm.



A student at the Buena Park Learning Center tends to the garden.



Early & Expanded Learning Administrator Mary Beckelheimer counts blocks with a student at the Buena Park Learning Center.



A magnifying glass offers this student a close-up look at a spider during a science unit.

Orange County Department of Education

AI Signals a New Era for Teaching and Learning in Orange County



Dr. Stefan Bean
Superintendent

As an eighth-grader, Ibrahim Memon from Tustin's Legacy Magnet Academy began working on an AI-powered app designed to allow rideshare drivers to keep 100 percent of their fares.

Today, Ibrahim is a high school junior. And his app? It's operational in Seattle.

Ibrahim's story highlights the extraordinary potential of Orange County's young innovators, especially when supported with cutting-edge educational tools like artificial intelligence. And his success is a prime example of the outcomes we hope to encourage and nurture at the Orange County Department of Education through our own AI initiative.

We already know that AI in schools is about more than just the adoption of a new technology. It signals a transformative shift in how we educate our students, and there's no choice but to embrace it.

Indeed, to quote the Borg from Star Trek, "Resistance is futile" — but I don't mean that in a menacing way. The fact is this wave of technology is already here, and now it's up to us to harness it responsibly and strategically to enhance educational outcomes for all learners.

So far, the feedback we've seen from introducing AI in classroom settings has been highly encouraging. These emerging technologies not only make learning more interactive but also tailor instructional experiences to individual needs, making education more effective and engaging. Survey data shows a 90 percent satisfaction rate among students participating in AI-driven activities.

That said, the foundation of our strategy must be to support educators. That's why OCDE will be advancing AI fluency programs and comprehensive professional development opportunities to help make teachers' work more efficient and to maximize the impact of their instruction. Additionally, we will be promoting collaborative environments where students and teachers can explore the potential of AI together, fostering inclusive and innovative educational spaces.

Our Vision and Goals: At the Orange County Board of Education meeting on Sept. 4, our staff outlined a new strategic vision for the integration of artificial intelligence and the empowerment of students and staff. This wasn't about mandating a new direction, but rather supporting our districts and scaling up the innovative work many are already doing.

As we stated at that meeting, we envision a future where AI revolutionizes education, unlocking unprecedented opportunities, and we are committed to harnessing its transformative power responsibly to enhance learning, inspire innovation and prepare every student for success in college, careers and beyond. By embedding ethical principles into our AI initiatives, we strive to create an educational environment where technology uplifts humanity, fosters creativity and builds a brighter future for all.

That's the overarching vision, but clear, measurable goals will be essential to ensure that OCDE's AI initiative achieves its intended objectives and enhances educational outcomes.

By 2025, for example, our target is for 90 percent of local districts to adopt ethical AI guidelines that promote responsible use across all educational settings. We also commit to holding regular meetings throughout the year to review progress and adjust strategies to make sure our efforts remain aligned with our broader educational objectives. Additionally, we want to work closely with district leaders to guarantee that all students have access to advanced technologies.

The Road Ahead: Wes Kriesel and Kunal Dalal, who joined OCDE in late 2023 as administrators of AI and innovation, are already providing direct support to our 28 school districts, and they're working in collaboration with Dr. Sabba Quidwai of Designing Schools. Last year, Dr. Quidwai led numerous sessions under the OC AI Forward banner, which brought together local superintendents and other educational leaders to drive this important conversation.

We are also partnering with OC Workforce Solutions and the Orange County Business Council to align our efforts with workforce demands so that students are on track for fulfilling, in-demand careers, and we are actively seeking support from local colleges and universities. Notably, 71 percent of industry leaders already say they prefer candidates with strong AI skills.

As county superintendent, one of my top priorities is to ensure the responsible integration of AI technologies within our educational framework, because we know that those who are adept at harnessing its potential will find themselves at a distinct advantage.

But this initiative isn't merely about adapting to the needs of the future — it's about actively shaping it. Through our collective efforts with our districts and other educational partners, we can and will continue to position Orange County as a leader in educational innovation, one that is actively preparing our students for success in an increasingly AI-driven world.

School News

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