

EUSD’s innovative approach to recess sparks engagement and inclusion

At the heart of **Encinitas Union School District** (EUSD) are five core values that guide the work we do every day: joy, belonging, service, innovation, and integrity. These values shape everything from program development to school culture and help inform key decisions as we continue to grow. One area where these values are especially evident is in our approach to lunchtime recess.



Encinitas Union School District’s expanded recess opportunities are designed to create an inclusive environment where every student can discover something that sparks their passion, builds new friendships, and nurtures their personal growth.

Recess is a vital part of the elementary school experience—a time when students can unwind and refresh. For many, it’s synonymous with playing sports and climbing on playgrounds. While these activities remain beloved, EUSD recognizes that not all students are drawn to physical play every day. That’s why this year, we have focused on expanding recess opportunities to better serve all students and foster a greater sense of joy and belonging.

Since the start of the school year, we’ve introduced a wide variety of options during lunchtime recess to cater to the diverse interests and needs of our students. The goal is to ensure every student has a space where they feel engaged, comfortable, and ready to thrive.

One of the most exciting changes is the rise of student-led clubs. At each campus, students are stepping up to organize groups

based on their passions. A great example is our Green Teams, where students collaborate on sustainability projects to make eco-friendly changes in their school communities. This initiative provides students with the opportunity to take ownership of their environment while building valuable teamwork skills.

In addition to student-led clubs, EUSD’s enrichment teachers—specialists in art, STEM, music, P.E., and garden/nutrition—have expanded recess choices. Garden

clubs are flourishing, with students planting seeds and helping maintain school gardens. Science clubs provide space for innovation, where students can engage in activities such as engineering their own fan-propelled vehicles.

Many schools have introduced creative spaces like art tables stocked with materials for students to express themselves through drawing and crafting. For students seeking quieter, reflective time, school libraries are open during lunch recess, providing a

peaceful environment to read, explore new topics, or relax. Lunch Bunch, organized by social-emotional wellness teachers, is another great option where students engage in activities, such as board games, that foster teamwork and build social skills.

At **Capri Elementary**, the Empowered Kids program further enhances recess offerings. This initiative supports students in setting personal goals, building self-esteem, and developing a growth mindset. “These programs help students thrive both inside and outside the classroom,” says Chris Juarez, principal at Capri. “By offering a variety of activities during recess, we foster inclusion and create opportunities for students who might otherwise feel isolated to connect with others.”

For students who enjoy staying active, we’ve expanded organized sports during recess. Soccer, basketball, and other activities are available, thanks to the support of our P.E. teachers, PTAs, and the Encinitas Education Foundation. These partnerships ensure every student who wants to participate can enjoy an engaging experience.

These expanded recess opportunities go beyond offering variety—they are designed to create an inclusive environment where every student can discover something that sparks their passion, builds new friendships, and nurtures their personal growth. We are incredibly grateful to our teachers, staff, and community partners for helping bring this vision to life.

As we continue through the year, we look forward to seeing how these new opportunities shape our students’ school experiences.

Donor’s support, \$2.3M endowment aid STEM students

When Geraldine (Gerri) Frances Brooks earned a degree in biology in the 1950s, the acronym we now know as STEM – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics – had yet to be coined. But it would become an indelible part of her legacy.

As president and one of the founding members of the Lawrence E. and Neva B. Fenstermaker Foundation, Brooks has been instrumental in supporting STEM at **Cal State San Marcos** for nearly

30 years. While the Fenstermaker Foundation is now sunsetting, its legacy will live on through a \$1.3 million endowment in perpetual support of STEM students at CSUSM. This transformative gift will be further amplified by a \$1 million matching contribution from the Epstein Family Foundation.

“Supporting STEM has been one of the most rewarding parts of my life,” Brooks said. “Three decades ago, we chose CSUSM because it was new and so full of potential. This university is exactly what we needed in North County San Diego, and it has been wonderful to watch it grow.”

Over the years, in addition to the recent endowment, the Fenstermaker Foundation has donated \$1.9 million to STEM initiatives at CSUSM, providing more than 130 STEM students with scholarships and establishing



Geraldine (Gerri) Frances Brooks (center), with CSUSM President Ellen Neufeldt (left) and Brooks’ daughter Peggy Chammas, has been instrumental in supporting STEM at CSUSM for nearly 30 years.



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a \$40,000 library endowment for science resources.

“We are deeply grateful to the Fenstermaker Foundation board of directors,” CSUSM President Ellen Neufeldt said. “Their generosity has transformed countless lives, creating a ripple effect of innovation and opportunity that will benefit our community for generations to come.”

As a first-generation college student, Brooks put herself through school at Adelphi University in Brooklyn. At the time, it was rare for women to pursue higher education or build careers in fields such as biology, making Brooks’ achievements both groundbreaking and inspiring. Notably, she worked alongside pioneering scientist George Nicholas Papanicolaou, whose development of the Pap smear revolutionized cervical cancer detection.

The Fenstermaker Foundation was founded in 1995 by Lawrence Fenstermaker, who served in the 11th Naval District in San Diego. While Fenstermaker did not attend college, he was passionate about learning and helping others obtain an education. Along with Brooks as one of the original five board members, the Fenstermaker Foundation started giving to CSUSM in 1996 and has remained a steadfast supporter ever since.

“The Fenstermaker Foundation’s endowment will allow CSUSM Summer Scholars students to get paid, hands-on research experiences in STEM,” said Julie Jameson, director of CSUSM’s graduate program in biology. “This type of opportunity truly changes lives and fulfills the university’s mission of student success.”

CSUSM proudly honors Brooks, a remarkable champion of STEM education. Through her visionary leadership, the Fenstermaker Foundation has made an enduring impact on CSUSM, fostering innovation and creating opportunities that will empower students and transform lives for years to come.