School News
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Buena Park School District

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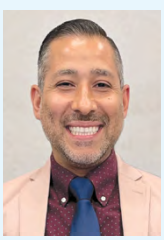




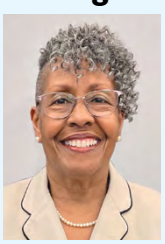
Governing Board



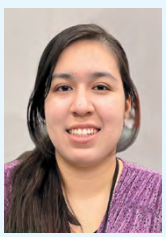
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Jerry Frutos
President Pro Tem



Rhodia Shead
Member



Brenda Estrada
Member



Michael Jensen
Member

BPSD Governing Board Earns Top Honors with Golden Gavel Award



Dr. Julienne Lee
Superintendent

I'm proud to announce that the Buena Park School District Governing Board has been awarded the Golden Gavel Award by the California School Boards Association (CSBA). The Golden Gavel Award is the highest honor a school board can receive in California. This recognition is reserved for one school board across the entire state that has demonstrated outstanding leadership, commitment to effective governance, and dedication to advancing the success of every student in the district.

The members of the BPSD Governing Board are tireless advocates for Buena Park students and families. They have championed early childhood education, learning recovery initiatives, and equity-driven programs. They have focused on improving learning conditions for children and developing policies that prioritize the needs of Buena Park's diverse population. Their emphasis on high-quality teaching and learning extends to the development of their own learning, not only through school site visits and participation in parent and community engagement, but also through their own professional improvement. Their individual strengths complement one another, and they genuinely seek to understand one another's perspectives. Together, their efforts have helped to ensure that the District continues its forward motion to create successful outcomes for all students.

Please join me in congratulating our Governing Board for being recognized for their dedication to student success and their commitment to Igniting the Passion for Learning! They bring honor to our district and our schools.



BPSD Governing Board accepts the Golden Gavel Award at the CSBA Education Conference at the Anaheim Convention Center in Dec 2024. Pictured: Superintendent Dr. Julienne Lee, Ms. Brenda Estrada, Ms. Rhodia Shead, Ms. Tharwa Ahmad, Mr. Jerry Frutos, and Mr. Jason Chong.

District Visual & Performing Arts Programs Showcased for BPSD Governing Board

Buena Park School District's Governing Board and other honored guests gathered to enjoy a special revue of the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) programs across the district. The presentation began outdoors with the dramatic stylings of Buena Park Middle School's percussion and drumline. Guests then moved indoors to enjoy a pop-up art show from the District Art Showcase and the Buena Park City Art Show on the walls of the Board Room. Performers from Corey Elementary School followed up with excerpts from their recent production of "The Lion King," a partnership with Disney Musicals in Schools and Segerstrom Center for the Arts, and singers from all seven BPSD schools sang "We Are the World" as a highlight from the recent District Choir Festival. The performances reflected the quality, range, and heart of the VAPA programs across the District, and the enthusiastic response from the audience put the support of the community on full display.



Drumline student plays the bass drum during the performance for the Governing Board.



Students from the all-District choir sing "We Are the World."



BPSD Governing Board Member Rhodia Shead browses the wall of District artwork.



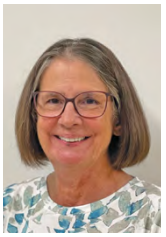
Buena Park Middle School drumline gives a dramatic performance for the BPSD Governing Board.



Buena Park Middle School Choir Director Kelsey Lih warms-up the all-District choir.

BPSD Education Foundation

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Mary Murray
President

BPSD's Education Foundation Uplifts the District Choir Festival

The seventh annual Buena Park School District Choir Festival featured students from across the district performing together, sporting brightly colored shirts according to school, and having a ball. The success of the event was due in part to contributions from the Buena Park Education Foundation, which strives to provide resources for a range of initiatives that enhance student learning and development. The venue was packed with families who had come to listen to their school choir perform, and one by one, each group of performers came forward to sing their two songs. But the event was much more than the sum of its parts. The choir festival exemplified the spirit of the theme—Unity—and the shared value that the word embodies. "Count on Me" by Bruno Mars, "Better Together" by Jack Johnson, and the classic Motown "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" all speak of a common purpose that can be felt on every school campus across the district. BPSD teachers and staff go to extraordinary lengths and spend untold hours in the service of students and families, giving their love and expertise each day to lift every student and help them achieve their full potential. The Buena Park Education Foundation's mission of "enhancing education excellence" is part of this common purpose, and the festival itself was the perfect example of the unity that can be felt at every turn, from students and families to staff and community members.

At the end of the evening, all seven choirs returned to the stage together to sing Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie's "We Are the World," and the line "It's true, we'll make a better day just you and me" exemplified the fact that every person across the district, from the youngest TK students to community groups like the Ed Foundation, make a "better day" by working together.



Emery Elementary School choir students sing "We Go Together" from the musical Grease as part of the BPSD Choir Festival.



Students from Pendleton Elementary School perform "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" as one of their choir festival songs.



The all-District choir performs "We Are the World" as the final song.

Superintendent's Soccer Cup Showcases the Spirit of the BPSD Community

Buena Park School District's Superintendent's Cup originally evolved as a way to build community in a post-pandemic world, and this year, the event exceeded this vision beyond all expectations. The crowds were bigger and louder than ever, with roughly 1,000 students, family members, school staff, and community partners showing up to cheer on their players. The games themselves illustrated the cooperation, perseverance, and teamwork that the students have learned along the way through their practices and drills, and it was apparent that the players had developed both ball skills, such as passing and kicking, and interpersonal skills, like how to communicate together and work as a team. The vibrant community spirit of Buena Park School District was also alive and well with community partners joining in the fun to create a memorable experience for everyone. KidHealthy helped set up the event; Providence/St. Jude's "Move More, Eat Healthy" program and CalFresh's "Healthy Living" program each had booths available; and Buena Park High School provided their beautiful field and stadium to accommodate the scope of this BPSD signature event.



Gilbert and Pendleton players vie for the ball during a Superintendent's Cup game.



Emery and Corey players display their fancy footwork in the final minutes of the game.



Whitaker and Pendleton players chase down the ball in an impressive burst of speed.



Whitaker and Emery players each have a foot on the ball in a very close matchup.



Corey and Gilbert players offer one another high-fives after a game.



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Finding My "Why" in the Wake of Operation Babylift



Dr. Stefan Bean
Superintendent
Orange County
Dept of Education

Fifty years ago last month, Operation Babylift brought thousands of orphaned children from South Vietnam to the United States. I was one of them.

Some of you already know my story. Born in Saigon during the Vietnam War, I contracted polio at age 2, leaving me paralyzed from the waist down. I was later found abandoned on the streets and taken in by an orphanage.

At age 4, I was placed on one of the last Babylift flights out of Vietnam. By mistake, I was directed to a different U.S.-bound plane than the one originally planned — a twist of fate that probably saved my life. The flight I was supposed to be on crashed just 12 minutes after takeoff, killing nearly everyone on board.

In the U.S., I entered foster care before being adopted by Gregory and Judy Bean, who welcomed me along with dozens of other children into their San Diego home. With their love and support — and the encouragement of teachers, church members and friends — I found not only stability but a sense of purpose.

See **Finding my "WHY"** • *Page 7*

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Finding My "WHY" • *From Page 6*

That purpose has guided me ever since.

I chose a career in public education because I believe in the promise of every student, especially those who've faced barriers — including English learners and students with disabilities. My "why" is rooted in the belief that every student has potential that should never be overlooked. All deserve access to an inclusive, rigorous education and the support systems that will help them thrive.

Five decades later, events like Operation Babylift — and the lives they forever changed — are among the many powerful narratives featured in the Vietnamese American Experience Model Curriculum. Led by our staff at the Orange County Department of Education, this optional curriculum provides lesson plans, primary sources and professional learning tools that schools and districts can integrate into existing coursework or use to create new courses.

Back in 2022, OCDE was chosen to lead not only the Vietnamese American curriculum project but also two others focused on Cambodian and Hmong American histories. Created in partnership with educators, historians and community members, these efforts explore the journeys, the struggles and the lasting contributions of these communities and the individuals who shaped them.

See **Finding My "Why"** • *Page 16*







Jeselle Mata
Principal

Disney Musicals in Schools Program at Corey Elementary School Delivers an Enchanting Production of *The Lion King*

Corey Elementary School's joyful production of *The Lion King*—the school's fourth annual musical—featured a homemade Pride Lands Savanna backdrop and a "Circle of Life" animal parade with outsized masks. A modernized sound system was also recently installed to enhance the production. This musical, like *The Jungle Book*, *101 Dalmatians*, and *Finding Nemo* before it, was made possible by a partnership with Disney Musicals in Schools, a program through Segerstrom Center for the Arts that supports arts programming and introduces musical theater to Orange County schools. As part of this program, Corey teachers attend a summer training at Segerstrom in directing and choreography. During the school year, students meet twice a week after school to act, sing, and dance, and the end result is a full-scale musical production fueled by hundreds of hours on the part of Corey's dedicated teachers and students. The most notable result of this program, perhaps, is the pride and self-confidence that the students develop as they mount a production that starts in an empty multipurpose room and ends months later on a transformed stage in front of a cheering audience.



"Circle of Life" animals parade in and take their place as the chorus.



Timon and Pumbaa sing "Hakuna Matata" to an impressionable Simba.



Performer's costume receives some finishing touches before the show.



Performer's costume piece is secured before the show begins.



Dancers pose on stage and wait for the applause to die down.



Rebecca Taylor
Principal

Students Become Experts with Genius Hour Projects at Emery Elementary School

As part of the fourth-grade informational writing unit at Emery Elementary School, teachers set aside time each week for students to research unique topics of their choice and design a 3D model that represents that subject. This program -- called "Genius Hour" -- allows students to explore subjects that may not be included in the curriculum and teaches them to be self-directed learners and to follow their personal interests and passions. Generally, the students already know a lot about their chosen subjects, which range from Godzilla and gardening to the solar system and baseball. Essentially, each student becomes the resident expert (or genius) on that particular topic. Studies show that giving students autonomy and freedom of choice engages them more deeply not only in their chosen topic but also in other units of study and in school in general. Ultimately, students dress up like their chosen subject and memorize and present their topic to family members, peers, and teachers in a classroom fair-type setting.



Four students look through one another's Genius Hour projects with interest.



Parent and sibling read through the written component of a Genius Hour project.



Parent looks at the manipulatives from an interactive Genius Hour project.



Parent and student admire a classmate's Genius Hour project.



Leslie Chavez
Principal

Gilbert Elementary School Equips All Students with a College and Career Readiness Mindset

Gilbert students take a journey of career exploration and self-discovery that begins in kindergarten and includes assemblies and annual college field trips to start important conversations about future pathways. From an early age, students learn firsthand about post-secondary programs and career possibilities that help spark interest and engagement and keep their focus on making these dreams a reality. This year, kindergarten students traveled to Cypress College, and for most, it was their first visit to a college campus. First graders explored Cal State University Long Beach, second graders walked around Golden West College, and third graders took the bus to Orange Coast College. Fourth graders, like the first graders, went to CSULB, and fifth graders toured the University of California, Irvine. Gilbert's college and career readiness program is an extension of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, which equips students with the skills they need to be successful in school and reach for the stars.



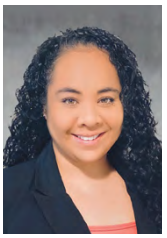
Gilbert students give a presentation about Gilbert's College & Career Readiness program to the BPSD Governing Board.



Gilbert assembly features speaker Kate Crawford, Program Specialist from Orange County Department of Education's Career Education Department.



Former Gilbert students sit on a panel to talk about their college or career paths and answer questions.



Dr. Loriann Leota
Principal

Special Olympics Field Day Brings Crowds and Smiles to Pendleton Elementary School

Students, families, and staff at Pendleton cheered loudly and waved signs and pom poms as athletes and buddies marched out together and walked under the giant blow-up "START" arch, marking the beginning of the Special Olympics Field Day. Pendleton hosts this event each year as part of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Program, with the entire school community turning out to celebrate the participants and the spirit of meaningful inclusion. During the Special Olympics Field Day, students rotate through stations that include kicking soccer balls into goals, throwing basketballs into hoops, and navigating balance challenges. The stations are a culmination of the units and skills that students have been practicing throughout the year. Every week, athletes and buddies meet to work on these skills during shared PE time, with schoolmates from the same grade simultaneously learning a more complex version of the same skill or game and getting to know the athletes. The decision to align the PE schedules for all students across each grade reflects the Special Olympics vision of Universal Play, regardless of ability, so all students can get to know one another and play together.



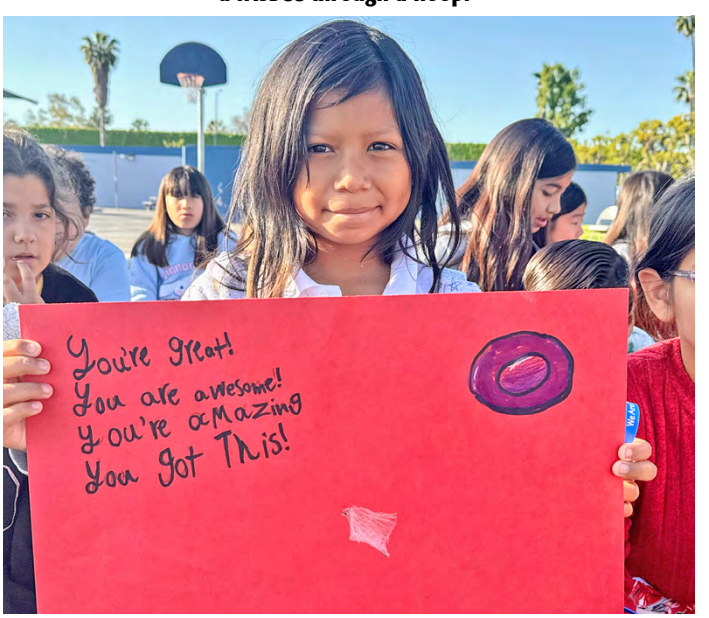
Athlete demonstrates balancing skills surrounded by smiles.



Special Olympics athlete and buddy work together to throw a frisbee through a hoop.



Buddy and Athlete on the soccer field kick a ball into the goal together.



Student fan holds up a sign to cheer on the athletes.



Stephanie Williamson
Principal

Whitaker Elementary School takes Early Inclusion to the Next Level

Transitional Kindergarten teachers at Whitaker Elementary School had often observed that the social-emotional and academic needs of special education and general education students overlap, and they decided as a team to try adding a shared reading time to the start of each day. The students already enjoyed recess and lunch together, but this reading time would take the inclusion model one step further, with the goal of spending 40% of the day mainstreamed. At first, the shared time was limited to morning songs, but it soon grew to include lessons on phonemic awareness and the simple manipulation of sounds. From there, the teachers added shared mathematics time, with choral counting and a daily "notice and wonder" math activity. And all the while, empathy and friendships among the students blossomed. "It was like the magical part of the day," says Principal Stephanie Williamson, "and it opened up all these opportunities." Students in special education with more limited verbal skills thrived because they now had more general education models, and general education students who tended to be quieter started speaking more because they had more available partners. For teachers, the shared teaching time doubled as mentoring time for modeling, and they also enjoyed the flexibility to connect individually with students as needed. "It's not just about building better students, but building better people," says Williamson. "When you come here, you will find a happy community where children know they belong. They know their self-worth, and they're learning how to use their voice. That's where we're starting. And we're starting young."



Two students look at a book together before the lessons begin.



Coloring is more fun when it's done around a table with friends.



A class of attentive students follows the teacher's directions.



Students participate in a phonics lesson during their full inclusion reading time.



Dr. Joaquin Valdez
Principal

Anaheim Ducks Foundation Brings Rink, Hockey Program, and a Lot of Fun to Beatty Middle School

Beatty Middle School students, decked out in orange Anaheim Ducks t-shirts, gathered to celebrate their partnership with the Anaheim Ducks Foundation and to dedicate their new street hockey rink. In addition, 20 Anaheim Ducks staff and corporate partner volunteers flooded Beatty for a one-day, Power PLAY! transformative bonanza to paint two murals and install a Ducks logo at the center of the new rink. "This incredible partnership gives our scholars the opportunity to explore a new sport, stay active, and have fun," said Principal Dr. Joaquin Valdez. The rink itself was built by the Buena Park School District alongside Ben's Asphalt, Nowlin Fence Inc., and Sports Resource Group. For this particular project, the Anaheim Ducks Foundation teamed up with the Find Your Grind Foundation, which was founded 10 years ago to empower youth to find passion and purpose. Founder Nick Gross offered the Beatty student body some inspirational words to kick off the new rink and celebrate the community partners who made it possible.



Students on the Beatty street hockey team inaugurate their new rink with a scrimmage.



Students are seated in the new street hockey rink for the dedication ceremony.



District leadership pose with students and community partners (plus Anaheim Ducks mascot Wild Wing).



Beatty students pour out of the rink after the dedication ceremony.



Jay Beckelheimer
Principal

New Applied Arts Workshop at BPMS Expands Intersectional Career Technical Education (CTE) Pathways

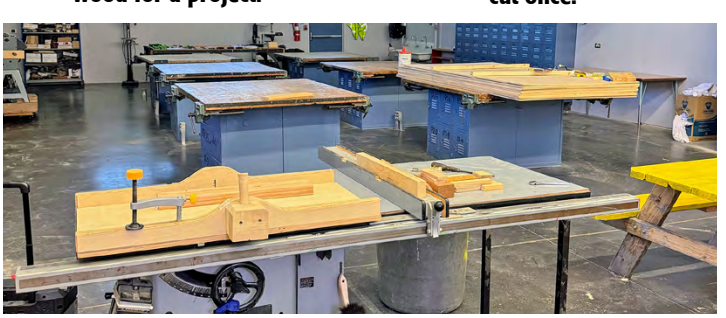
When an opening presented itself for a new applied arts teacher, Buena Park Middle School Principal Jay Beckelheimer seized the opportunity not only to grow the program but also to expand the intersectional Career Technical Education culture across campus. He approached the Carpenter's Union to help him find an exceptional candidate, and they confirmed that Gabriela Pierce, a CTE-credentialed candidate, would be applying, and that she just might be able to take the program to the next level. To ready the space, the construction crew removed an existing wall, resurfaced the floors, and restocked the workshop space with state-of-the-art materials and equipment. All that remained was to develop a project-based curriculum that channeled real-world needs by overlapping other CTE programs – and that's where the magic begins. Applied arts students have built movable walls that double as outdoor, traveling art exhibits to support the art department's efforts to make their art projects more visible to the student body. Plans have already been drawn for students to construct chicken coops that will be installed in the new ag science center. And as the ultimate CTE collaboration, advanced applied arts students will build playhouses for all of the District preschools, with art students slated to paint them and the ag team tapped to landscape the land around them. This "truly laced-together collaborative effort," as Principal Beckelheimer describes it, represents an intersectional CTE mindset and promises more projects and growth next year.



Student uses a handsaw to cut wood for a project.



Industrial Arts student carefully follows the adage, "Measure twice, cut once."



A broad view of the new Industrial Arts workshop.



Two students work together to assemble a plant table for the new ag science center.



Teacher Gabriela Pierce assists a student with measurements for constructing a toolbox.

Buena Park Preschools

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Mary Beckelheimer
Administrator Early and Expanded Learning

Gilbert Elementary School's New Early Education Center Features Dual Language Immersion Program

A new early education center on Gilbert Elementary School's campus will soon be the home of Buena Park School District's Dual Language Immersion (DLI) early learning program, beginning Fall 2025. This program is available all day and tuition-free, nurturing students to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism in English and Spanish. Students will learn to think, read, write, and communicate in both languages, and academic instruction will also be provided in English and Spanish to ensure that DLI students develop strong reading and writing abilities in both. Unlike traditional ESL and bilingual programs, DLI enriches students' understanding by adding a second language without diminishing their first language or cultural identity. No prior knowledge of English or Spanish is required for students entering the DLI program in preschool or kindergarten.



Student colors a picture of a fish.



Student pauses in the middle of an art project.



Student flashes a smile before walking into class.



Students match arctic animal pictures together during a game of concentration.



Students enjoy floor time together with their books.

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Finding My "WHY" • *From Page 7*

On April 27, I'll return to San Diego to speak about Operation Babylift aboard the USS Midway Museum as part of an event marking the 50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon and the rescue of thousands of Vietnamese refugees. I'll be reflecting on the journey that brought me here — and sharing how our Vietnamese American Experience Model Curriculum is helping shape the way we tell these stories in our schools.

Because I know from experience: it only takes one person, one belief, one opportunity to change a life.

School News

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25 YEARS

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Summer Fun Word Search Contest

Rules! **One word in the list is NOT in the word search.**
When you have completed the word search, one word will be left and that word you email to: SchoolNewsKay@gmail.com (Please put BPUSD in the subject line)

Entries must be received by June 15, 2025
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