

COMMUNITY CORNER

Developing Responsible, Respectful and Prepared Students

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: March 4, 2025

Hemmerling Elementary Students Advance to National History Day-California State Competition

BANNING, CA – Banning Unified School District proudly celebrates Hemmerling Elementary School fifth graders Melanie Avila and Ella Brock for their outstanding achievement at the Riverside County National History Day competition. Their project, "Restoring Native Tradition," won in the Elementary Group Poster category, earning them a place in the National History Day-California State Competition, held May 1-4, 2025, at California State University, Sacramento.

Their project explores how dam construction impacted Native American communities, leading to environmental and health consequences. The students highlighted how dams have historically restricted access to natural resources, affecting indigenous traditions and well-being and how recent efforts to remove some of these dams are restoring natural ecosystems and cultural heritage.

The visually striking poster features a border with colors reflecting Native heritage, a background depicting the Klamath River, and mountains and greenery to illustrate the natural landscape. The students incorporated before-and-after images of dam construction, showcasing the changes to the environment and the effect on food sources. Additionally, the project includes a map of the Klamath River and information about salmon, a vital resource for Native communities that was significantly impacted by the dams.

“This project was important to us because we had never heard about this issue before,” said Avila. “We wanted to make a difference and help others understand how Native American communities were affected.”

The duo chose to work together because of their close friendship and shared passion for history. Avila, who has competed at the county and state levels before, is focusing on improving her communication skills with judges as she prepares for the next round. For Brock, this marks her

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first time advancing to the state level, and while she is a little nervous, she is excited to practice interview skills with her mother to prepare.

“History is interesting because we get to learn about the past and see how we can make the world a better place,” said Avila.

Brock added, “It’s fascinating to see how things from the past affect us today.”

The Riverside County National History Day competition took place on Saturday, February 22, 2025, at Canyon Springs High School in Moreno Valley, featuring 73 projects from 135 students across 11 school districts and private schools.

“We are incredibly proud of Melanie and Ella for their dedication to historical research and storytelling,” said Superintendent Terrence Davis. “Their project sheds light on an important issue that isn’t widely recognized, and their success reflects their passion for learning and making a difference.”

Banning Unified School District congratulates Melanie and Ella on their achievement and wishes them the best of luck at the National History Day-California State Competition.

For more information about National History Day, visit <https://www.nhd.org>.

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PHOTO CAPTION: Ella Brock and Melanie Avila, both fifth-grader students from Hemmerling Elementary School, proudly showcase their History Day project.

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