

School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation

Covering the Fullerton School District



Volume 13, Issue 38

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Fullerton School District CHANGE MAKERS



Dream Catchers



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Dream Catchers

Fullerton School District is proud to announce the 2025-26 Dream Catchers. This program highlights students who are taking their learning beyond the classroom to make an impact in their community. This initiative shares what FSD students are doing with their interests, passions and strengths.

Dream Catchers are students who are pursuing their passion and making their dreams a reality. This initiative launched by the district is now in its 8th year and is a recognition program for students who are putting their dreams into action. FSD highlights students who have shown dynamic skills in identifying and putting their dreams into tangible actions.



These Dream Catchers were recognized by the Fullerton School District Board of Trustees on Tuesday, January 20, 2026. They are also featured on a poster and highlighted on the Fullerton School District website and social media. Congratulations to our FSD Dream Catchers!

Please see 2025-2026 DREAM CATCHERS • Page 4

2025 - 2026 Dream Catchers



Abigail C., for her commitment to community service supporting Autism, the elderly, and therapy through dogs.



Samantha R., for her national level competitions in BMX bike riding and club level soccer while being a model student for the PBIS principles of being respectful, responsible, and safe.



Tegan Y., for her talented writing for the Fullerton Observer for the last five years and serving as the publication's current youth editor.



Alyas M., for his involvement in student council, maturity, empathy, and ability to balance academics, sports (baseball) and leadership responsibilities.



Max C., for his outstanding leadership in baseball and positive influence on others. He led his Golden Hill Little League team to a historic state championship and was selected for the USA Baseball National Team Identification Series.



Emmeline N., for her dedication and championship ranking as a jiu-jitsu athlete and leadership roles in ASB, Superintendent's Advisory Committee, and AI Collaborations Committee.



Sebastian K., for his perseverance and resilience in educating others about diabetes and sharing his personal experiences and scientific knowledge while advocating for the diabetic community.



Anabel L., for her talent as a gifted artist, work as a Jr. Coach for the PBIS program, athlete, and helping care for her family.



Bianca J., for helping her family run their restaurant business, involvement in her cultural dance club and membership in Nicolas Leading Ladies.



Maize H., for her dedication to singing and songwriting, including winning the PTA Reflections Contest at her school for one of her original songs.



Christian S., for his entrepreneurial spirit of selling handmade bookmarks and design of a scissor cover for classmates to use.



Henri V., for his service as a Golden Big Buddy for the District 56 Challenge League to support children with special needs as well as raising over \$3,000 in donations allowing for league fees to be waived for families.

Innovation and Instructional Services

1401 W. Valencia Dr., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-7400 • www.fullertonsd.org



Jeremy Davis
Assistant Superintendent

Apple Distinguished District

All 20 schools in the Fullerton School District (FSD) have been recognized as Apple Distinguished Schools for the 2025–2028 program term, making FSD the only district west of Texas where every school has earned this prestigious global distinction.

Apple Distinguished Schools are recognized for their commitment to innovation, leadership, and excellence in teaching and learning through purposeful use of technology. This honor reflects FSD’s long-standing vision of integrating technology to inspire creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving—beginning in Transitional Kindergarten and continuing across all grade levels.

“This recognition reflects the incredible work of our teachers, leaders, and students,” said Jeremy Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Innovation and Instructional Support. “Technology in FSD classrooms is not an add-on,



FSD Board of Trustees share recognition for this distinguished feat.

but a powerful tool that prepares students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.”

FSD has been a leader in educational technology for decades, pairing access with strong digital literacy, wellness, and safety practices to ensure technology enhances learning while supporting student well-being.

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School News

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26 YEARS

Personnel Services

1401 W. Valencia Dr., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-7400 • www.fullertonsd.org



Christopher Wilkins
Interim
Director

Fullerton School District Makes History Again: All 20 Schools Earn PBIS Platinum for Second Consecutive Year

For the second year in a row, the Fullerton School District (FSD) is celebrating an impressive milestone: all 20 schools across the district have earned the prestigious Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Platinum distinction from the California PBIS Coalition. This back-to-back achievement places FSD among the highest-performing PBIS districts in the state and reflects the district's commitment to fostering student wellbeing, inclusion, and positive school culture.

PBIS is a research-based framework designed to proactively teach, reinforce, and support positive behaviors of students in all school settings. The goal behind these strategies is to create a multi-tiered system that ensures academic success through strengthening social, emotional, and behavioral skills.

The district recently celebrated this historic achievement with recognition from its Board of Trustees, where Amy Sotolongo, a Teacher on Special Assignment who oversees the district's PBIS work, shared, "PBIS is grounded in the belief that positive behavior flourishes when students experience clarity, consistency, and connection. Just as we teach academic skills, we also teach the behaviors and expectations that help students feel successful and supported in our schools."

Amy Sotolongo emphasized that PBIS is not a single program but a comprehensive, research-based framework that empowers FSD schools and students with proactive strategies to teach, model, and reinforce positive behavior.

"Earning Platinum recognition for our PBIS work across all of our campuses for a second consecutive year is the direct result of every person on our team dedicating their work to ensuring student success," Deputy Superintendent Dr. Chad Hammitt said. "We are so proud to be able to give students skills above and beyond academics that will serve them well for the rest of their lives."

FSD's PBIS journey began nearly a decade ago with just two schools earning recognition. This school year, the district is not only celebrating continued implementation success but also its status as one of the few districts in California with 100% of schools receiving Platinum honors—the highest level of PBIS distinction. In addition, recognition in back-to-back years denotes FSD's systems are not only successful but sustainably embedded across campuses.

The PBIS awards annual evaluation process sees schools evaluated on rigorous statewide standards, including:

- Alignment of classroom expectations with schoolwide PBIS systems
- At least 80% of students with zero or only one major behavioral referral
- A score of 70% or higher on the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), a national PBIS fidelity tool
- Data showing effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports for students needing additional assistance
- Evidence of positive academic growth, including i-Ready progress

And for FSD, PBIS doesn't stop in the classroom—these practices are also extended to our transportation department and found on every bus.

Amy Sotolongo shared that FSD bus drivers are trained in the PBIS framework, using a dedicated bus matrix, and reinforce positive behaviors with "bus bucks." FSD is the only known school district in Orange County that is currently implementing PBIS on the bus. Bus drivers receive ongoing training and support in addressing student needs.



See **PERSONNEL SERVICES** • Page 7

PERSONNEL SERVICES • From Page 6

“Our transportation team’s willingness to help us implement PBIS not only supports safer and more predictable bus environments, but it also reinforces that every adult in FSD plays a part in student success,” Dr. Hammitt said.

PBIS in FSD operates within a broader Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), which includes restorative practices, trauma-informed strategies, counseling supports, and other research-based interventions.

Under the MTSS framework:

- Tier 1 supports provide clear expectations, positive reinforcement, predictable routines, and social-emotional learning for all students.
- Tier 2 supports offer targeted small-group interventions such as mentoring, Lunch Bunch groups, and counseling circles.
- Tier 3 supports deliver individualized, intensive interventions—including behavior plans, wraparound supports, and trauma-informed care.

These integrated supports help ensure that approximately 75–85% of students succeed with Tier 1 alone, while Tiers 2 and 3 meet the needs of students requiring additional care.



As Fullerton School District celebrates this second consecutive year of districtwide Platinum distinction, leaders emphasize that the achievement reflects far more than an award. It symbolizes a deeply ingrained culture focused on students, relationships, and hope.

FSD continues to set a statewide standard for what is possible when a district commits to whole-child wellness and empowers every student to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. For more information on California’s PBIS Coalition, visit pbisca.org, and to learn more about PBIS in FSD, visit fullertonsd.org.





Rachel McCormick
Principal

Winter STEAM in Action

Winter provided a wonderful opportunity for students to explore STEAM learning during our classroom winter celebrations. Throughout these celebrations, students engaged in hands-on activities that sparked curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving. One favorite activity was creating a snowstorm in a jar. Using a clear jar, warm water, oil, white paint, and an effervescent tablet, students observed how liquids interact and enjoyed watching a “snowstorm” come

to life. This activity supported scientific thinking as students made predictions, asked questions, and shared observations with classmates.

Additional winter STEAM activities included designing symmetrical snowflakes, building structures with marshmallows and toothpicks, and exploring how ice melts under different conditions. These activities blended science, engineering, art, and math in an engaging and festive way. Our classroom winter celebrations allowed students to learn through play, collaboration, and exploration, reinforcing that meaningful learning can happen during joyful moments together.



Students pose with their “snowstorm in a jar.”

Beechwood School

780 Beechwood Ave., Fullerton, CA 92835 • 714/447-2850 • www.fullertonsd.org/beecewood



Hannah Lim
Principal

Talents Beyond the Classroom

Throughout the school year, Beechwood students have multiple opportunities to showcase their various talents. We are extremely proud of our students' academic achievements, but also love being able to see them shine on stage and in other mediums. Most recently, our students dazzled the community and their families with their prowess in visual and performing arts.

Two hundred Kindergarten-8th grade students performed in this year's musical, Aladdin, Jr. They performed six sold-out shows at the Curtis Theatre, as well as two shows for their peers. Their hard work at rehearsals was evident in their performance. We felt like we were being transported on a magic carpet ride along with them!

Both elementary and middle school choirs performed a holiday-themed Winter concert. Students entranced us with songs such as Walking in a Winter Wonderland and Somewhere in My Memory, among others. It was a pleasure to hear their clear, joyful voices harmonize and come together melodically under the helm of the gifted Mrs. Christine Lee.

Our various band and string orchestras each held concerts to standing-room only audiences. Our skillful Mrs. Mary-Louise Uys once again has guided our beginning students to develop into true musicians. Both concerts blended both traditional and classical music along with more recent popular pieces, which appealed to all ages.

As 2026 progresses, we cannot wait to see our Beechwood Bobcats continue to inspire and awe us with their gifts and growth!



Commonwealth *Elementary School*

2200 E. Commonwealth Ave., Fullerton, CA 92831 • 714/447-7705 • www.fullertonsd.org/commonwealth



Jean Summy
Principal

New Playgrounds

Our three new Commonwealth playgrounds, made possible through funding from the Measure N Bond Issue, have quickly become joyful hubs of movement, imagination, and connection for our students. From the moment the gates open, laughter fills the air as children climb, swing, spin, and explore spaces thoughtfully designed just for them. Each playground offers age-appropriate equipment that encourages physical activity, creativity, and cooperative

play, giving students meaningful opportunities to build strength, confidence, and friendships. We are already seeing students challenge themselves, invent games, and include one another in ways that reflect the positive, caring culture we value at Commonwealth. These playgrounds are more than places to play—they are extensions of our learning environment that support the whole child. Whether it's a kindergartner conquering the slide for the first time or older students collaborating on climbing structures, the excitement is contagious. Our students are proud of their new spaces and truly love spending time outdoors.





**Julie
Lucas**
Principal

Dream Catcher

It is truly a pleasure to share the story of one of our remarkable students, sixth-grader Samantha Ratzlaff. Samantha has been part of the Fern Drive family since transitional kindergarten, and over the years we have had

the joy of watching her grow into a kind, dedicated, and driven young leader. We are excited and honored to celebrate Samantha as one of the Fullerton School District's 2026 Dream Catchers! Samantha brings quiet determination and a strong work ethic to everything she does. She has two passions that mean a great deal to her, the first being BMX bike riding. Samantha began riding at just three years old and has spent years practicing, competing, and traveling across the country with the support of her family. Her perseverance and commitment led her to an incredible accomplishment last year when she placed 14th in the nation at the BMX Grands in Tulsa, Oklahoma! While Samantha is sometimes soft-spoken at school, she shows a confident, competitive spirit when she is on the track. Samantha is also deeply passionate about soccer. She has been playing since the age of five and currently competes at the club level, traveling to tournaments throughout the United States. As a center forward, she plays with focus, confidence, and heart. At Fern Drive, Samantha is a model citizen who consistently demonstrates our PBIS expectations of being respectful, responsible, safe and kind. She is thoughtful, kind to others, and works hard in and out of the classroom. We are incredibly proud of Samantha and grateful to celebrate her as a Dream Catcher who truly represents the best of Fern Drive!



Robert C. Fisler School

1350 Starbuck St., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-2890 • www.fullertonsd.org/fisler



Dr. Caroline Llewellyn
Principal

More than a Performance

At Robert C. Fisler School, everything we do is guided by a shared vision to develop students into today's innovators, forward-thinkers, and leaders who shape their future and create solutions for a better world.

Our December production of *Annie, Jr.* brought that vision to life. Through singing, acting, and dancing, students built creativity, confidence, teamwork, and leadership skills. Behind the scenes, they practiced

problem-solving, supported one another, and engaged in creative thinking. Most importantly, the experience helped students discover their passions and believe in themselves as leaders. Every performer had a voice, a role, and a chance to shine.

The entire Fisler community came together to celebrate our students and their hard work. *Annie, Jr.* was more than a performance. It was a powerful example of our students living out our vision through leadership, creativity, and passion. We are so proud of our Fisler Navigators and the heart they brought to the stage.



Golden Hill *School for Creative & Performing Arts*

732 Barris Dr., Fullerton, CA 92832 • 714/447-7715 • www.fullertonsd.org/golden



Dr. Neil Anderson
Principal

Arts Integration

At Golden Hill, arts integration isn't about creating a perfect performance or a polished final product. It's about how students learn.

Arts integration means students use the arts: movement, music, visual art, drama, and design, as tools for thinking. A math lesson might include choreography to explore patterns. A science unit might ask students to sketch, build, revise, and explain their thinking visually. A history lesson

might come alive through role-play and storytelling. The focus is always on the process: questioning, experimenting, collaborating, and reflecting.

This approach helps learning go deeper. When students actively engage with content in multiple ways, they make stronger connections and retain understanding longer. Arts integration develops creativity, critical thinking,

communication, and problem-solving skills students need far beyond the classroom.

At Golden Hill, the arts are not an add-on or an occasional enrichment activity. They are embedded into rigorous instruction and intentionally designed to support all learners. In our diverse school community, arts integration allows students to show what they know in ways that honor different strengths, learning styles, and communication needs.

Mistakes are viewed as part of growth. Curiosity is encouraged. Collaboration is expected. You may see students moving, drawing, building, or performing, but what's really happening is deep thinking and meaningful learning.

That's arts integration at Golden Hill: a learning environment where students don't just memorize answers, they experience learning, and discover how to think creatively, confidently, and critically every day.

Hermosa Drive *Elementary School*

400 E. Hermosa Dr., Fullerton, CA 92835 • 714/447-7720 • www.fullertonsd.org/hermosa



Julianne Ettinger
Principal

Designed with Care

Hermosa Drive Elementary is proud to highlight student Madelyn "Maddie" Fan, a dedicated member of a Girl Scout Brownie Troop. As part of earning their Create and Innovate badge, Maddie and her troop worked together to donate a custom designed reading chair to Hermosa Drive Elementary. Guided by their troop leaders, the girls decided a comfortable chair would benefit students and staff by providing a cozy place

to read, relax, and recharge. At one of their troop meetings, the girls selected the fabric and later attended a factory visit, where they learned how a chair is made, explored materials, made design decisions, and watched frames and cushions come together using large machines. Maddie shared that seeing the process firsthand was interesting and exciting. She feels proud knowing the chair will be enjoyed by Hermosa Drive students and staff and believes giving back is an important part of being a community member. Maddie's work reminds us that caring actions, big or small, can have a meaningful impact on others.



Ladera Vista *Junior High School of the Arts*

1700 E. Wilshire Ave., Fullerton, CA 92831 • 714/447-7765 • www.fullertonsd.org/ladera



Dr. Bill Lynch
Principal

Advanced Performing Arts

Ladera Vista Junior High School for the Arts is proud to present the Broadway musical *The Lightning Thief*, performing on April 9 and April 10 at 6:30 PM. Based on the popular novel, this high-energy production brings Greek mythology to life through an exciting blend of humor, heart, and unforgettable music. Audiences from our school, families, and the greater Fullerton community will be treated to an evening filled with adventure, witty storytelling, and a powerful message about identity, belonging, and discovering one's strengths.

This fully student-driven production showcases the incredible talent, creativity, and dedication of Ladera Vista students both onstage and behind the scenes. Our all-student backstage crew plays a critical role in keeping the show running smoothly, managing everything from lighting and sound to scene changes

and technical elements. In addition, Ladera Vista is fortunate to have an exceptionally dedicated group of parent volunteers who support the production in all phases, including costume creation, set design, and production logistics. Their partnership helps bring this ambitious show to life.

The cast and crew are drawn exclusively from Ladera Vista Productions (LVP), our musical theater production class. LVP also includes our "Triple Threat" students—those who take dance, choir, and theater as part of their academic schedule—providing students with a comprehensive performing arts experience that emphasizes collaboration, discipline, and artistic excellence.

Students interested in joining the LVP program or exploring other advanced performing arts electives can find audition and program information on our school website. Tickets are open to the public and available online. We invite you to join us for an unforgettable night of music, myth, and middle-school magic.

Laguna Road *Elementary School*

300 Laguna Rd., Fullerton, CA 92835 • 714/447-7725 • www.fullertonsd.org/laguna



Stephanie Guppy
Principal

A Mural of Hope, Growth, and Possibility

Laguna Road is excited to share a beautiful new addition to our campus, our brand-new school mural! This project began with the creativity and vision of our students and staff, who came together to dream up ideas that reflect who we are as a school community. After thoughtful discussion, we selected a theme that celebrates hope, growth, and the limitless potential of our

students. From those ideas came our inspiring message: "Where Dreams Take Flight." A talented local artist partnered with a team of 3rd–6th grade students to paint the mural. Through bright colors and meaningful design, they helped bring the artwork to life while learning new skills and taking pride in their work. The birds soaring across the mural symbolize courage, imagination, and reaching new heights. The finished mural is vibrant, colorful, and inspiring, and it has already become a special point of pride on our campus!



Student artists in front of our new mural!

Maple Elementary School

244 E. Valencia Dr., Fullerton, CA 92832 • 714/447-7590 • www.fullertonsd.org/maple



Dr. Amanda Sobremesana
Principal

Chill Area for Everyone

Maple Elementary launched its Café—*Chill Area for Everyone*—this past semester! The Café is a nurturing space created to support students in taking a break, regrouping, and re-entering the classroom feeling focused and ready to learn. When students are feeling heightened emotions, the Café provides a positive, respectful option for students to step away from the classroom and receive support.

While in the Café, students may work with our school counselor or mental health associate to:

- Use calming strategies and sensory tools to regulate emotions
- Strengthen self-awareness
- Practice reflection skills
- Learn and apply healthy coping strategies

The Café's purpose is to equip students with tools they can use independently to navigate challenges, build resilience, and return to learning prepared to engage and succeed.





Jose Varela
Principal

Nicolas Leading Ladies Bring Art, Joy, and Connection to Oakmont Senior Living

The Nicolas Junior High School *Leading Ladies* recently participated in a heartwarming community service visit to Oakmont Senior Living Center, where students spent

time painting and building meaningful connections with residents. The visit was led by teacher Dominique Estrada, whose guidance and support helped make the experience both impactful and memorable.

During the visit, students partnered with residents to paint together, sharing conversations, laughter, and encouragement as each artwork took shape. The activity sparked joy and creativity, while also opening the door for residents to share stories and memories from their lives. For the students, the experience offered a powerful lesson in empathy, patience, and leadership.

Ms. Estrada emphasized the importance of service, kindness, and giving back to the community, reinforcing the values of the Leading Ladies program. Her leadership helped create an environment where students felt confident engaging with residents in meaningful and respectful ways.

Staff at Oakmont Senior Living Center expressed gratitude for the students' positive energy and compassion. The visit exemplified Nicolas Junior High School's commitment to developing strong leaders who value community connections. Both students and residents left with smiles, full hearts, and a shared reminder that art can beautifully bridge generations.



Orangethorpe *Elementary School*

1400 S. Brookhurst Rd., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-7730 • www.fullertonsd.org/orangethorpe



**Deborah
Bennett**
Principal

Winter Sing-a-long

The winter show at Orangethorpe was an incredible celebration of student talent, dedication, and community spirit, as students proudly performed songs they had practiced for weeks for their parents, families, and distinguished guests. The atmosphere in the multipurpose room was electric, filled with excitement, applause, and joyful anticipation from start to finish. A multitude of cameras and phones filled the air as enthusiastic parent paparazzi

eagerly captured every note, smile, and special moment. Adding an extra special touch, the multipurpose room was beautifully decorated by our amazing parent volunteers, whose creativity and care transformed the space into a festive winter showcase. Behind the scenes, teachers worked tirelessly to rehearse with students, coordinate performances, and ensure every detail came together seamlessly. Their hard work and dedication were evident in the confidence and pride displayed on stage. The winter show was truly unforgettable and served as a heartwarming and meaningful way to head into the holiday season.



Pacific Drive *Elementary School*

1501 W. Valencia Dr., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-7735 • www.fullertonsd.org/pacific



John Leonard
Principal

Pacific Drive Dual Language Academy Family Arts Night

On November 5, 2025, Pacific Drive's Spanish Dual Language Academy held the first of two DLA Family Night events. With an emphasis on cultural arts and Dia De Los Muertos, Pacific Drive DLA teachers and volunteers created arts and crafts projects for families

to participate in. From decorating sugar skulls, aluminum art with an All The Arts Teacher, or facepainting, families had many opportunities to choose from. With the help of one of our DLA families, the event also held an opportunity drawing with fresh produce from a local farm as the prize, including beautiful fresh lettuce and many other organic vegetables.

The Dual Language Program at Pacific Drive is proud of our students for striving towards being bilingual, biliterate and culturally competent, and this family arts night was another wonderful opportunity for families to celebrate culture together. Thank you to all of our DLA families for attending and for our amazing DLA teachers for putting this event together!



Second grade teacher Maestra Vaca is also an expert face painter!



DLA Family Night had a great turnout!

Parks *Junior High School*

1710 Rosecrans Ave., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-7785 • www.fullertonsd.org/parks



Jenna Breite
Principal

Parks Junior High Robotics Advances at Beach Brawl Tournament

Parks Junior High School competed in the Beach Brawl VEX Robotics Tournament held at McBride High School in Long Beach on Saturday, December 15, 2025. The blended middle school and high school competition featured 42 teams from cities across Southern California, including Irvine, Santa Ana, Van Nuys, North Hollywood, Carson, Arcadia, Rolling Hills Estates, Anaheim, Encino, Palos Verdes Estates, Torrance, Hacienda Heights, and Long Beach.

Parks Junior High teams advanced to round 16 of 42, placing them among the top competitors in the field. The result reflects steady improvement and increased competitiveness within the school's robotics program.

The team is led by teacher Alejandro Rios, who oversees robotics instruction and competition preparation. Under his guidance, students have strengthened their engineering, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.

Parks' robotics program has shown notable growth over time, improving from near the bottom of earlier tournaments to achieving advancement rounds in regional competitions. The school community expressed pride in the students' continued progress and accomplishments.



Raymond *Elementary School*

517 N. Raymond Ave., Fullerton, CA 92831 • 714/447-7740 • www.fullertonsd.org/raymond



Cristina Centeno
Principal

New Play Space

Raymond recently celebrated the opening of our new TK/Kindergarten playground, a space thoughtfully designed for our youngest students. The playground features age-appropriate equipment that supports imaginative play, gross motor development, and positive peer interactions in a safe, engaging environment.

This new playground joins our recently completed upper grade playground, providing students across all grade levels

with modern outdoor spaces that promote physical activity, social development, and joy. Together, these playgrounds enhance our campus and support student well-being.

Both playground projects were made possible through Measure N, reflecting our community's commitment to investing in safe, high-quality facilities for students. We are grateful for the continued support that helps create environments where children can learn, grow, and thrive.

These new playgrounds have quickly become favorite spaces, filled with laughter, movement, and meaningful connections.



Raymond's beautiful playground for our youngest learners in TK and Kindergarten.

Richman *Elementary School*

700 S. Richman Ave., Fullerton, CA 92832 • 714/447-7745 • www.fullertonsd.org/richman



Devi Sok-Huynh
Principal

How Far We'll Go: Richman Sets Sail with *Moana, Jr.*

Richman is proud to present its 9th STAGE production this year, a program that has become an integral part of our school culture with student participation tripling since its inception. Joining STAGE is a meaningful experience for our third graders. As one parent shared: "My daughter has grown up watching these shows and was so excited, it was finally her time to

be part of the production." Our student actors echo this enthusiasm, saying, "STAGE was the highlight of every year at Richman...it has helped shape who I am as an actor," and "I always come back to STAGE because every time I'm on stage, I feel like I can do anything." We are also proud to recognize award-winning teacher and STAGE director Sara Cooper, who was granted \$5,000 from an anonymous FEF donor on January 13, 2026, in support of the program. Mrs. Cooper and Mrs. Partida are looking forward to producing their biggest STAGE production yet.



64 students will perform *Moana, Jr.* for their peers and families in April 2026.

Rolling Hills *Elementary School*

1460 E. Rolling Hills Dr., Fullerton, CA 92835 • 714/447-7795 • www.fullertonsd.org/rolling



**Lindy
McNutt**
Principal

Rolling Hills Attends Pali Institute!

For four days in January, our 6th grade students attended Outdoor Science School with Pali Institute. OSS provides a transformative experience for students, fostering personal growth through outdoor education. Found in Running Springs, the camp focuses on building meaningful relationships among students, creating a sense of community that extends beyond the classroom. The curriculum is designed to incorporate group challenges, encouraging

teamwork and problem-solving skills. Students engage in various outdoor activities that promote independence and self-discovery, fostering a sense of responsibility and confidence. Through hands-on experiences, Pali Institute aims to instill a love for nature, enhance scientific understanding, and create lasting memories that contribute to the holistic development of each student. This is the first year Rolling Hills has attended this camp and we can't wait to return. We are grateful to Mrs. Dyer, Mrs. Hodge, Ms. Gerber, and Ms. Guardamondo for supporting our students through this wonderful opportunity!



Sunset Lane *Elementary School*

2030 Sunset Ln., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-7750 • www.fullertonsd.org/sunset



Dr. Tracy Gyurina
Principal

Let the Play Begin

Construction is officially complete, and our Sunset Lane campus is buzzing with excitement as both of our brand new playgrounds are now open! Our TK/Kindergarten playground and primary playground have been fully installed, welcoming students back to spaces designed for movement, imagination, and fun. The wood chips are gone, replaced with safe, modern play surfaces and engaging equipment that invite climbing, sliding, and exploring.

From the moment the playgrounds opened, the joy at Sunset Lane was unmistakable. Happy faces, laughter, and nonstop energy filled the air. Students are thrilled to have fresh spaces to play, connect with friends, and enjoy their recess time to the fullest. These playgrounds are already becoming favorite gathering spots, bringing new excitement around every corner of our school.

We extend a heartfelt thank you to our incredible community for supporting Measure N and helping make this project possible. Your commitment to our students has created spaces that promote play, wellness, and joy for years to come.



Playgrounds open, joy unlocked! Sunset Lane celebrates the grand opening of their new playground.

Valencia Park *Elementary School*

3441 W. Valencia Dr., Fullerton, CA 92833 • 714/447-7755 • www.fullertonsd.org/valencia



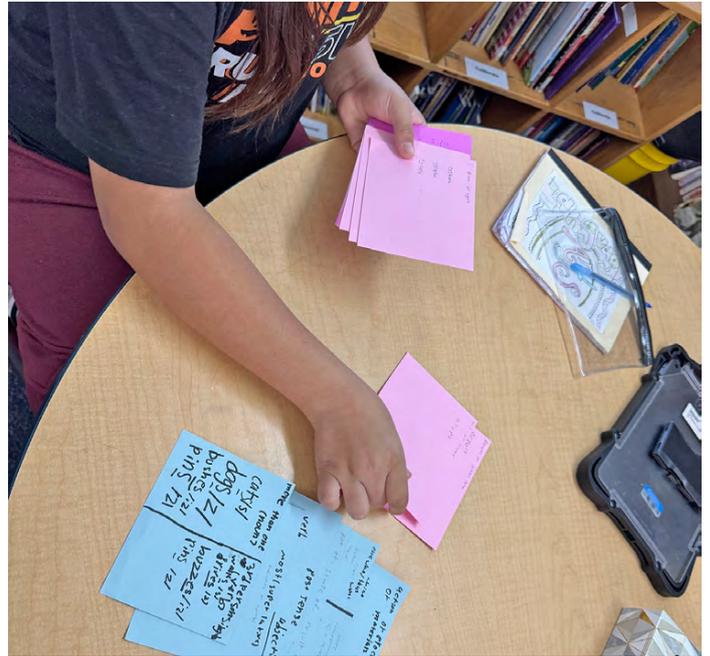
Melanie Carmona
Principal

Building Strong Readers with IMSE

Valencia Park Elementary is strengthening reading instruction across grade levels through IMSE (Institute for Multi-Sensory Education), a research-based approach aligned to the Science of Reading. Students in grades K–6 receive clear, systematic instruction in phonics, spelling patterns, and word structure to become confident, accurate readers.

In the early grades, students learn how letters and sounds connect to support decoding and spelling. In upper grades, IMSE helps students break apart and understand longer words using prefixes, suffixes, and roots, improving fluency and comprehension.

Through multi-sensory strategies like writing in sand, tracing letters, and using hand motions while saying sounds, students actively engage in their learning. These consistent routines across classrooms will ensure strong reading growth year after year and have already had an impressive impact on our assessment results!



Woodcrest Elementary School

455 W. Baker Ave., Fullerton, CA 92832 • 714/447-7760 • www.fullertonsd.org/woodcrest



Soroya Ramos

Interim Principal

Empowering Lifelong Wellness

This fall, our 4th and 5th grade students had the opportunity to participate in the Move More, Eat Healthy program, an engaging and impactful initiative designed to promote lifelong habits of wellness. Thanks to generous funding, we were able to bring this meaningful program to life and empower students with the knowledge and skills needed to make healthier choices every day.

Throughout the program, students took part in hands-on learning experiences that made health and nutrition both accessible and fun. They learned how to select nutritious ingredients, prepare simple and budget-friendly meals, and understand the role of physical activity in

maintaining overall well-being. Expert instructors led dynamic demonstrations and interactive lessons, helping students build confidence as they explored foundational cooking skills and healthy lifestyle practices.

The impact of the Move More, Eat Healthy program was evident across campus. Students showed high levels of engagement and enthusiasm, reported feeling more capable of making healthy food choices, and demonstrated a growing willingness to try fresh and nutritious foods. Many proudly shared that they brought what they learned home to their families. Teachers also noted increased awareness around nutrition and greater participation in physical activities among students.

This program has helped foster a positive culture of wellness at our school and supports the overall health and well-being of our students.



Orange County Department of Education

200 Kalmus Drive, Costa Mesa CA 92628 • 714/966-4000 • www.ocde.us

Investing in Bold Ideas to Strengthen Student Success



Dr. Stefan Bean
Superintendent

Every day across Orange County, educators are innovating on behalf of students.

They adapt lessons to meet individual needs. They reshape learning environments to spark curiosity. They try new approaches when old systems fall short.

At its heart, innovation is our profession's ongoing commitment to doing better for the young people we serve. And today, I'm proud

to share that the Orange County Department of Education is taking an important step to elevate and expand this work through the launch of our Innovation Funding Initiative.

As a key component of our [5-3-1 Strategic Plan](#), this initiative is designed to help districts move promising ideas from concept to practice. Beginning Dec. 3, Orange County school districts serving students in grades TK–12 can apply for awards of up to \$525,000 to support three-year projects that address unmet needs and strengthen student engagement and achievement.

Up to six districts will be selected in this first round, with funded work beginning in July 2026.

Innovation doesn't always require reinventing the wheel. Sometimes it means taking a strategy we already know and applying it in a new way — one that reaches more students, builds stronger connections or improves efficiency.

It may mean testing a creative model for teaching literacy, offering real-world learning experiences that

better prepare students for careers, or implementing new systems that support wellness and belonging. What matters most is that these ideas are grounded in strong educational theory, responsive to local needs and positioned to make a lasting, scalable impact.

Through this initiative, districts will have the opportunity not only to implement effective practices but to learn from one another. Our goal is to build a countywide network where educators can share strategies, explore what works and strengthen outcomes together.

That collaborative spirit is central to our 5-3-1 Strategic Plan, which also calls for expanding inclusive career technical education, fostering emotional intelligence, making schools safer, thoughtfully integrating artificial intelligence, and strengthening instruction and literacy.

Orange County is rich with talent and creativity, and when we align those strengths, we accelerate progress for all students. That's why I'm excited to see the proposals that emerge, and I'm even more excited to see how they will shape the future of teaching and learning.

This initiative is an investment in students, in educators and in the belief that bold ideas can lead to extraordinary outcomes. In many ways, it also reflects the innovative mindset we hope to cultivate — a fresh approach to supporting districts as they design, test and expand what works for students.

For more information or to explore eligibility, visit ocde.us/InnovationFunding.

Tegan's Book Review

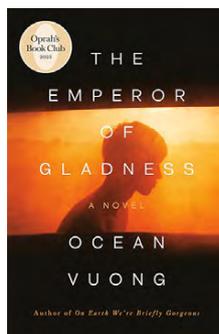


Tegan Y.

Kindness to & from Escaping Thoughts

Ocean Vuong's *The Emperor of Gladness* is a delicate and thought-provoking novel infused with poetry and lyrical prose. Grief, immigrant backgrounds, marginalized lives, and loneliness are all exposed. Every sentence is a careful masterpiece and could stand alone as a quote. Vuong's writing is soft yet nonetheless powerful, and is suitable for all readers over 14.

The story follows two characters: the elderly Grazina and 19-year-old Hai in despair. It begins with Grazina's



unexpected act of saving Hai from suicide, and their bond deepens from then. Hai becomes a source of care and hope for the grandmother, ultimately saving her by preserving her sense of self amid dementia and fading memories. *The Emperor of Gladness* shows that while remembering can be a precious luxury, forgetting can be a relieving mercy.

Tegan is an eighth grader who enjoys music, books, and art.