



**State of the Schools
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Pasadena Unified School District**

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Good evening, everyone, and thank you for joining us for the annual State of Schools event. I'd like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of our guests and dignitaries for being here tonight and a special thank you to our host, Principal Veronica Villagrana, and the entire Mary Jackson STEAM Multilingual Magnet team for welcoming us to this amazing campus.

I'd like to recognize elected/appointed officials here today.

It's an honor to stand with you tonight to reflect on the state of our schools. In Pasadena Unified, this moment calls for both honesty and hope. We are a district that has faced some real challenges, and at the same time, we continue to see the strength, talent, and the promise of our students and staff shine every day.

Over the past year, our community has endured a great deal. The impact of the Eaton Fire is still with us. Families, students, and staff continue to navigate disruption and loss. At the same time, we have taken deliberate steps to support healing. We launched a comprehensive wellness plan, expanded access to mental health supports, and worked closely with state, city, and community partners to ensure that our schools remain safe, stable, and welcoming places for our students.

Our students are achieving at high levels.

Our graduation rate increased to 91 percent. More students are completing coursework required for college and career readiness. Early literacy is improving, and the majority of our youngest learners are reading above grade level. Attendance remains strong, reflecting that students feel connected and supported in their schools.

In the classroom, teachers and staff are working together, using data to guide instruction and ensure that every student is known, supported, and challenged. Our students are excelling in academics, the arts, athletics, and college and career readiness.

This year, our dual enrollment partnership with Pasadena City College won a statewide exemplary award for expanding college opportunities for PUSD students while they're still in high school. PUSD's Dual Enrollment program strengthens college readiness and opens pathways to future success.

Pasadena High School is earning statewide recognition for college readiness, ranking among the top three California public high schools with the highest acceptance rates to UCLA. All four PUSD high schools, including Marshall, Muir, and Blair, exceeded projected University of California acceptance rates this year.

12 students from John Muir High School will graduate this year with both AA degrees and high school diplomas, as well as certificates.

Thurgood Marshall hosted the annual Women's History Month, and Visual and Performing Arts students traveled to New York City for the WorldStrides Music Heritage Festival, where they showcased their talents and earned top honors for Chamber Choir and Sot to Voce, Chamber Orchestra, Jazz Band, and Wind Ensemble.

5 junior students from Blair High School have been named National Merit Scholars

Whether it is success in math competitions, recognition at science fairs, or performances on stage, our students continue to remind us what is possible when they are given opportunity and support.

At the same time, we must be clear about the challenges ahead.

Like districts across the state, we are facing a structural deficit. Rising costs, declining enrollment, and funding uncertainty required us to make difficult decisions.

We started this school year implementing a fiscal stabilization plan. We knew the financial road ahead would remain difficult, so we acted early by reconvening the Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee to identify \$30 million in reductions and savings. We took significant steps to reduce spending while prioritizing student learning. These decisions have been difficult. They affect people and long-standing practices, but they preserve the student experience and programs that are a signature of our district.

I want to acknowledge that directly. Behind every budget decision are individuals who have dedicated their careers to our students. We are deeply grateful for their service.

Our goal is to ensure long-term financial solvency and a vision for the future in which our PUSD students receive an education that prepares them to compete with peers from private schools in the region.

We are also engaged in important conversations about the future of our schools, including how we use facilities and ensure that every student has access to strong, sustainable programs. These conversations about transforming our schools and possible campus mergers are difficult.

Our commitment is to approach this work with transparency, care, and what matters most: student achievement and opportunity.

In Pasadena Unified, we know how to come together around our mission. We may not always agree on every step, but we are united in our belief that every student deserves a high-quality education, a safe environment, and a future filled with possibility.

When we look ahead, that belief guides our vision.

We're building a district where every student graduates prepared for college, career, and life. Where students are multilingual, critical thinkers, and strong communicators. Where they feel a sense of belonging and confidence in who they are.

We're building schools that are centers of learning and centers of community. Where families connect, partnerships thrive, and where curiosity meets opportunity for our students.

We are strengthening our systems because they are sustainable in the long-term, making thoughtful decisions for the long-term so that every investment supports student success.

I want to end with gratitude. Our community has been a constant source of support, from labor partners and parent organizations to the Clergy Community Coalition, the Pasadena Educational Foundation, and all of our partners in Altadena, Pasadena, and Sierra Madre.

I want to thank our students, who continue to show up, learn, lead, and inspire us.

Our story has been shaped by challenge, strengthened by community, and driven by a shared commitment to children in our schools.

Thank you for your partnership and your belief in the work we do together.

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