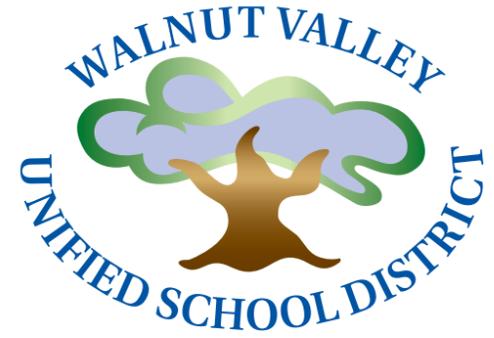


Outlook



Issue 39 SPRING 2018

Message from the Superintendent



Dear Walnut Valley family,

It's that time of year ... when we begin preparations for traditional end of school year activities, assessments, and celebrations. Moreover, it has certainly been a year to celebrate! I am extremely

proud of the academic growth of our students, the impact our staff has made, and the well-rounded experience that our schools provide for our young people.

This edition of our publication is filled with examples of student academic highlights and modern-day learning success stories, particularly in the area of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics); support staff and teachers who go above and beyond in serving our kids; and, perhaps most notably, a few examples of the everyday acts of generosity that our students and staff provide as part of a "whole-child" educational experience.

I am also pleased with the operational side of our school district. Our facilities are improving and being reimaged to match the current educational needs of our students. Again, we cannot emphasize the gratitude that we have for our community members and their overwhelming support of this past year's Measure WV school facilities bond. The strong standing of our community, the fiscal leadership and oversight of our Board of Trustees, and the financial management by the district's business team, were recently reflected in the outstanding credit rating that our school district received...ultimately resulting in better interest rates and savings for our citizens.

Lastly, during this time of year come accolades and recognitions for Walnut Valley students, staff, and schools. This past month, the Walnut Valley Unified School District was ranked in the top 2% of all school districts in the state by Backgroundchecks.com in their recently released report on California school districts. We certainly appreciate and take pride in such accolades. Similarly, be sure to take time to enjoy the end of year activities with your students and recognize their achievements ... whether matriculating into middle school, moving on to college, or simply progressing to the next grade-level, these are all hard earned, rigorous milestones to celebrate (for both our students and parents!).

Congratulations on a wonderful school year!

Dr. Robert P. Taylor

PLTW Distinguished Schools



Maple Hill Elementary, Westhoff Elementary, Diamond Bar High, and Walnut High have been recognized as 2017-18 Project Lead the Way Distinguished Schools. They have earned high praise for inspiring and engaging students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and preparing them for success in their careers and beyond. Only 97 elementary and 133 high schools across the United States received this honor. To be eligible for the designation, the elementary schools had to offer at least two PLTW Launch modules at each grade level and have more than 75 percent of the student body participating. PLTW High Schools must offer at least three PLTW courses and have 70 percent of students or more earn Proficient or higher on PLTW End-of-Course Assessments.

Embracing Kindness

Walnut Valley students take on the national challenge

All 15 campuses joined millions of people during The Great Kindness Challenge held January 22-26. At Diamond Bar High, fourth period classes competed to find the best way to pay it forward during "What would you do if you had \$100 to spread kindness?" conversations. The top five winning classes received the funds to carry out their thoughtful proposals.

Caring students in Charlotte Sorenson's Spanish class donated to the LA Regional Food Bank and Lisa Pacheco's English students supported Girl's League Adopted Child from another country. Kristine Palisoc's English IV Honors students donated to UNICEF to support under-represented girls' education. An Tran's Digital Engineering class used their 3D printer to design and create keychains to spread awareness about teen suicide during Valentine's week. And Isabelle Chiang's AP Psychology class created and delivered gift boxes for children at St. Jude Hospital.

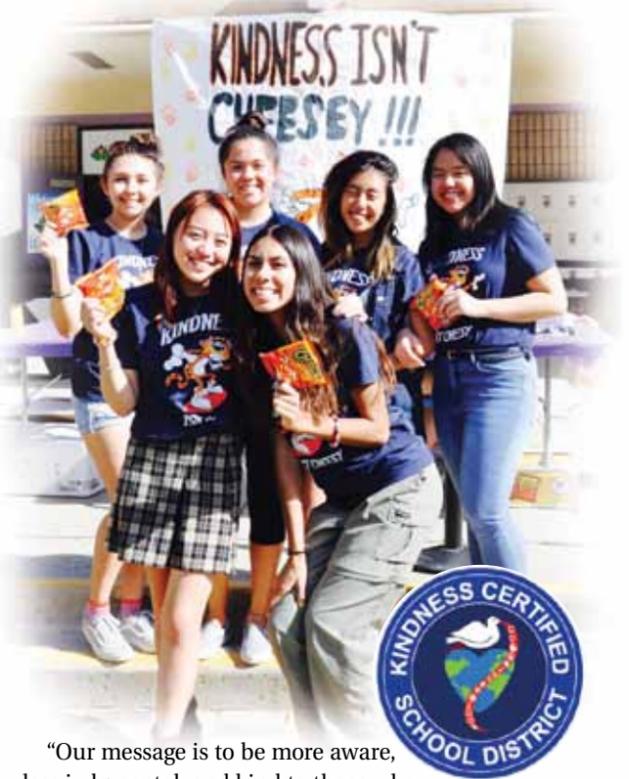
The school's Wellness Center sponsored daily activities to boost a culture of kindness among the teens.

Their message to students: Kindness Isn't Cheesy! One kind act by a thoughtful group of people can potentially create a ripple effect across our school and community, and potentially across the globe.

"We chose our slogan to get everyone interested," said junior Marissa Singh, a wellness consultant and peer counselor.

"When students participate in a random act of kindness they get a stamp and a free bag of Cheetos," explained senior Daisy Tseng and wellness team member.

Eager participants raced through an obstacle course in the quad by jumping through a hoop, doing a push up, making a basketball shot, and jumping rope. Other students gathered at tables to write kindness grams and make friendship bracelets.



"Our message is to be more aware, less judgmental, and kind to those who are navigating challenges," Wellness Center Coordinator Sandy Davis said.

Castle Rock Elementary students were challenged to complete a checklist of kindness activities. The Leadership Academy visited classrooms to read books about kindness and during recess hosted a kindness station where students could make cards, bookmarks, and signs. The student ambassadors led a wrinkled heart demonstration to show how once unkind words are spoken, wrinkles are left in the recipient's heart, explained teacher Megan Schweder.

"That's why it's always important to be kind in the first place," she said.

Suzanne Middle School students and parents were sprinkled with happiness as they arrived at school. Drama, PALS, and PLUS club members, dressed in cheery yellow t-shirts, greeted arrivals carrying signs with positive messages like Free Hugs, Be Kind, Stay Happy, and Breathe.

The Sights and Sounds of Excellence

New Showcase and STEAM Exhibit Celebrates Arts Education

An all-day extravaganza of talented singers, musicians, actors, dancers, and artists took the stage during an Arts Showcase held Saturday, February 24. The premier event held at Walnut High was created to celebrate the amazing arts education available in Walnut Valley and showcase students from all grade levels and programs.

Thousands of students were represented with performances in instrumental and vocal ensembles, commercial music, film, drama, dance, visual, and media arts. In addition, a STEAM maker's fair held in the multipurpose room featured robotics, 3D printing, video game design, and computer assisted design (CAD).

Students were excited to share their talents in several areas around the campus. Suzanne Middle School drama students previewed their upcoming production of "Bye Bye Birdie," while Chaparral's drama club performed songs from "Annie" in the Performing Arts Center.

Over 300 musicians from all three middle schools performed Disney's "Moana" and Walnut High's Band Buddies partnered with elementary instrumentalists in the gymnasium.

Diamond Bar High's Sprocket robotics team offered a physics lesson during a rubber band catapult activity in the STEAM exhibit.

"It creates enough force and speed to fling the pompom into the air!" said freshman Magdeline Gunawan.

Chaparral Middle School Design-Based Learning 6th graders demonstrated how technology is making their lessons come alive. Using green screen videos, students

place themselves in the cities they create in Sherry Robertson's social studies class.

"On our last green screen, we were trying to find out who stole King Tut's mask in Egypt. We put our puppets on the green screen and integrated them," said Julia Schlachter. "They're secret agents solving a secret mission!"

In Mike O'Shields ceramics classroom, art students assisted visitors at the potter's wheel throwing simple bowls.



Guests were invited to join a collaborative art project based on the Peter Reynolds book "The Dot" and Step into Art based on masterpieces and children's book illustrations created by elementary students.

The day culminated in a mass orchestra and choir performance combining the Diamond Bar and Walnut High orchestras and 200 vocalists of all ages.

Special thanks to lead VAPA teachers Corey Wicks and Leslie Schroerlucke and all the teachers, students, parents, staff, and administrators that participated and made the day such a success!

2017 Classified Employee of the Year

Kathy Frith is a shining example of what a Walnut Valley employee represents. A valued team member for 25 years, Kathy's knowledge about the District, schools, and community events makes her an outstanding resource for everyone.

Kathy is the first person to greet parents, community members, employees, and vendors. Her calm demeanor and professionalism equip her to answer the phone, address a parent at the front desk, and take care of an employee's needs all at the same time – and, always with a smile!

"I'm so grateful to work with and be nominated with all of our Cornerstone honorees," she said. "It's truly an honor to be chosen as the WVUSD Classified Employee of the Year!"



Students go one-on-one with the Superintendent

Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor fielded questions from elementary students during an official town hall meeting on March 6. About 100 inquisitive C.J. Morris third graders were eager to learn about the role of the Walnut Valley USD leader. The International Baccalaureate-Primary Years Programme students have been studying about government and how it affects lives at the national, state, city, or school level, teacher Dave Boots said.

The children came prepared with questions about family, hometown, background in education, role as superintendent, working with community and government, and more. Students took turns at the microphone and waited for the thoughtful responses during the hour-long event.

"What is the best thing about being the superintendent?" one youngster asked.

"In the five years that I've been here in Walnut Valley, my favorite thing has been going out and visiting schools," he said. "I spend every day

working with people – with kids like you, teachers, and principals. I like to find out all your interesting stories!" Dr. Taylor also told the students that there have been more changes in education during the past five years than in the last 30 or 40 years.

"It's been an exciting time to be part of that change and to see how successfully things have gone here."

The group of students also wanted some expert advice as they begin thinking about middle school and future careers.

"My one piece of advice I like to give young people is to find something you enjoy doing. If you find that, you'll be happy!"

Truth Stovall asked the final question, "What is your favorite color and why?"

"My favorite color is green and here's why: I told you I like sports and football. Raise your hand if you think you know who my favorite team is," Dr. Taylor said.

"Green Bay Packers!" the children called out.

Top Classified Employees Honored

Walnut Valley paid tribute to a dozen outstanding employees during the 19th annual Cornerstone Awards on February 1. Classified (non-teaching) employees work with dedication and commitment to help students succeed every step of the way. The Cornerstone Award recognizes exemplary classified employees who have gone "above and beyond the call of duty" in providing outstanding customer service to the District and community.

Congratulation to the 2017 honorees!

Kathy Frith, Receptionist
District Office

Tracey Carr, Nutrition Services Worker II
Quail Summit Elementary

Shawn Tampio, Office Assistant
Diamond Bar High

Fan Chau Wong, Instructional Aide II Bilingual/Bicultural
C.J. Morris Elementary

Yadira Gostel, School Administrative Assistant
Vejar Elementary

Daniel C. Chau, Custodian I
Suzanne Middle School

Martha Arellano, Child Welfare and Attendance Clerk
Vejar Elementary

Angel Chiu, Instructional Aide Bilingual/Bicultural
Quail Summit Elementary

Mike Jara, Library Media Technician
Chaparral Middle School

Robert Herrera, Custodian II
South Pointe Middle School

Joanna Flores, Instructional Aide II, Special Education
Chaparral Middle School

Linda Cuesta, Instructional Aide II, Special Education
Collegewood Elementary



Puppy with a Purpose

South Pointe's new addition, Laker, a therapy dog-in-training, shown with teacher Kevin Duh and students.

Passionate educators are willing to do just about anything

to foster student success. Meet Kevin Duh, a social studies teacher at South Pointe Middle School in Diamond Bar. The out-of-the-box thinking educator has found a way to combine his desire to address the emotional needs of his 8th grade students and his love of dogs.

This year, Duh was granted permission to bring a 3-month old puppy named Laker to his class as an official therapy dog-in-training. Since the first day of school in August, the lovable Goldendoodle, has been at Duh's side at all times during the school day. Duh, who has been teaching for six years, said he chose the popular "designer" hybrid dog for several reasons.

"Laker has the intelligence and hypo-allergenic qualities of a Poodle, friendliness of a Golden Retriever, and people aren't afraid of him," he said. "Already, two of my students have gotten over their fear of dogs," Duh reports.

Laker, who is now 10-months old, has proven to be a source of unconditional love to the young teens. Duh says his 160 students quickly developed a wonderful relationship with the gregarious and playful pup.

"I know there's a lot of brokenness in our community. He just brings a light into that," Duh

said. "Laker provides a place where students can drop their anxieties on him."

Duh has data that his dog has aided three students with testing anxiety during his short time on campus.

"For example, one student had a 65% average and I suggested he take Laker with him for his next test," he explains. "Within a couple weeks his scores went up to 84%. It's a huge jump!"

Duh admits that animals in school settings haven't traditionally mixed, and with a dog it's a "Goliath" of a responsibility. But this teacher is very dedicated to constantly making sure the dog is well-taken care of and that his students wash their hands after they pet him. He also carves out time each day to "run out" Laker's puppy energy.

Laker will be able to take the test to become a certified therapy dog this summer when he reaches his first birthday. Once Laker passes his test, the school plans to integrate the therapy dog into its social-emotional wellness program, according to Principal Susan Arzola.

"We are all cheering on Laker to make sure he passes all his classes!" said Arzola.

"This year, he's a cute puppy. Next year, I want him to be a schoolwide resource," adds Duh. "I would also love to see this program grow throughout our district and for a therapy dog to be at every site."

For now, the puppy with a purpose will continue bringing joy to the students at South Pointe.

Teachers Achieve National Board Certification

Walnut High English teachers Kellee Lyons and Jennifer Maletz have earned the profession's highest mark of achievement, as official National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT). The dynamic duo completed all four certification components between January and May of last year, a process that can take up to three years to complete.

"We both agree that it was harder than our respective Master's degrees and I am really proud of our accomplishment!" said Maletz, an educator with 15 years of experience.

Only 3% of the nation's teachers successfully pass the rigorous, performance-based, peer-review program, demonstrating their proven impact on student learning and achievement.

A total of seven Walnut Valley educators currently hold the top accomplishment, including Jeanette Koh – Director of Educational Services, Dena Lordi – Diamond Bar High, Paul McLaughlin – Walnut High, Helen Papadopoulos – Suzanne Middle School, and Mona Warren – Evergreen Elementary.



Spring Sports Update



Diamond Bar High Baseball, golf, boys track & field, and boys swimming are off to a great start with an undefeated start in League. The Brahma badminton team is currently undefeated. Track star Clara Ru broke the school record in the 100-meter hurdle with a time of 15.89.

Walnut High Walnut High School had a great winter season with 4 Hacienda league Championships: Girls Soccer, Girls Basketball, Girls Wrestling, and Boys Wrestling. Spring sports are underway. WHS hosted 13 teams at the annual Jim Polite Invitational Track Meet. Football and wrestling athlete Christian Elias was selected as a National Football Foundation Scholar Athlete.



Scout Gives Back

Evergreen Elementary students had a surprise on campus when they returned from a holiday weekend in January. An enormous 16' x 27' colorful map of the United States had been painted on the amphitheater stage. Diamond Bar High senior Jarrett Dang, 17, a member of Boy Scout Troop #730, decided to give back to his alma mater by completing his Eagle Scout Project at the school. Dang designed and carried out the community service project with the help of 33 fellow Boy Scouts, volunteers, friends, and parent leaders. He thought the map would serve as a "good educational tool for teachers" on the campus.

"I hope my project will serve as a fun and interactive way for students to learn the geography of their country!" he said



Listen to the Future!

Diamond Bar High School percussionist Jeremy Davis was heard around the nation on the NPR "From the Top" live radio broadcast on February 11. As the winner of the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist Award, the teen received a \$10,000 scholarship. Jeremy, age 17, performed "Land" by Takatsugu Muramatsu on the marimba. He performs in both band and orchestra in Diamond Bar High's award-winning program. The NPR podcast can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=lht0-Sn59Sc&feature=youtu.be.

Mustang Memories

A team of Walnut High students have been connecting with alumni and community members to capture the history and accomplishments from past and present. Through personal interviews, social media outreach, and a recent alumni day event, they will be marking the Mustang memories in a special edition. Walnut High will celebrate its 50th birthday during the 2018-2019 school year.

"It's been a heartwarming experience seeing so many alumni, retired faculty, and students share similar memories about Walnut High. Regardless the age or distance away from Walnut, Mustangs are Mustangs and will forever share that connection," said senior Amber Chen.



Westhoff Loves Science

About 120 Westhoff Elementary 4th graders presented a STEAM open house featuring Science Love Song, Solar Power Rag, Energy songs, and an energetic Science Gangnam Style dance, followed by interactive classroom activities with families on March 7. Young science experts shared facts about pursuing careers as coders, brain surgeons, nuclear physicists, computer programmers, biochemists, and seismologists. They proudly demonstrated 19 fascinating Project Lead the Way projects including mechanical devices, Tynker coding, electric circuits, and static electricity art. In the Makey Makey dedicated technology classroom, children viewed the Grand Canyon through augmented reality goggles and played water piano by simply dunking fingers in cups of water. The recorded musical notes were created by linking the water to keys on a computer keyboard.

"Students displayed collaboration, communication, and creativity while sharing their expertise with parents," said teacher Elaine Nakasone.



Flexible Seating Fosters Collaboration

Several Walnut Valley educators are discovering that flexible seating classrooms are providing learning environments that kids need.

Flexible classrooms give students a choice in what kind of learning space works best for them, and helps them work collaboratively, communicate, and engage in critical thinking.

At Quail Summit Elementary, first grade teacher Jessica Cabral replaced rows and rows of traditional desks with a variety of innovative seating options this year. Learning areas are now filled with stability disks, stadium chairs, yoga balls, camp chairs, Hokki stools, stack stools, lap desks, standing tables, and even a few "old school" desks. When her 26 students enter the classroom, they decide which type of chair or desk to occupy for the day.

"They enjoy having the ability to choose where they sit," Cabral said.

The new education space was intentionally designed to foster the five C's (critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and citizenship).

"They need to be given the opportunity to collaborate

and solve problems with different students in the classroom. They couldn't do that sitting in the same old spot every day," Cabral said. "I feel that flexible seating absolutely impacts student learning. Statistics have shown that movement increases memory," she added.

Most recently, Cabral purchased eight swivel Hokki stools, at \$96 each, with funds raised through the online classroom project site, Donor's Choose.

"The Hokki stools are an absolute hit. We can't get enough of them!" she shared.

After experimenting with choice seating options for years, second-grade teacher Kathy McLean "dove in all the way" with Goodwill tables repurposed with a fresh coat of paint and whiteboard tops. Then she brought in a few Wobble and Hokki stools and two double-standing tables. McLean said trusting her students to make the best choice for themselves has been an important factor in the success of an innovative classroom.

"Flexible seating has been a game changer for me!"



Quail Summit Rocks with Kindness

said elementary learning specialist Leann Legind.

The children hope that their kindness offerings will make a difference in the lives of the lucky recipients.

"I want our messages to inspire people," said fifth grader Lanna Xiao, age 11.

"My rock says 'You are special.'" shared first grader Emma Johnson, age 6.

Third grader Amy Song wrote "Even though you think no one cares, I care!" and classmate Kyle Chen declared "You are wonderful" on their rocks.

The "School with a Heart" hosted daily activities including "I can make a chain-ge in this world" paper chains and kindness notes were posted around the campus, along with an 80s-themed dress up day to commemorate the school's opening.



Quail Summit Elementary students are rocking their commitment to spreading kindness by marking the school's 30th anniversary with a week of caring and compassionate activities.

On March 7, the 645 students each took home a rock in their backpacks, but these were no ordinary rocks. The children painted colorful heart designs with personal messages of kindness, hope, joy, compassion, or strength on the small gray stones.

In the coming days and weeks, these kindness rocks, as they are called, will be left around the community, state, and even the world.

"We want to spread a positive message to others,"

Yes, Walnut High Can!

Canned food drive brings in more than 8,000 donations

Walnut High Key Club members counted, sorted, and boxed more than 8,000 cans of food to fill pantries in local homes and food banks. Donations of canned vegetables, beans, soup, meats, and other staple foods poured in during the two-week Yes We Can compassion project.

"The kids were bringing in cans every morning while I was coming in to work," said Key Club advisor Justin Panlilio who has headed up the project for the past seven years.

"It put me in a good mood knowing so many needy families will have food during the holidays," he said.

Donations doubled, up from 4,000 last year, during the 50th annual food drive held in partnership with Kiwanis of Walnut Valley, Panlilio reported. One reason was the new collaboration with Diamond Bar High's Key Club that brought in several hundred additional donations. The schools came together to show their compassion for helping the community.

About 35 Walnut High and Kiwanis Club volunteers gathered at 7 a.m. to distribute the food on Saturday,

December 16.

"I think it's insane that we have 8,000 cans this year!" commented senior Nathan Lin as the teens worked loading 200 packed cardboard boxes as cars and trucks arrived on campus.

In total, about 90 local families received two boxes with about 50-pounds of canned food, a large frozen turkey, fresh vegetables, and fruit.

"This project is about helping people in our community. We couldn't do it without the kids!" said Ray McMullen, a 53-year Kiwanis charter member.

Before the distribution day, Key Club volunteers put in many hours organizing and packing donations at the bleacher storage area, known as the dungeon.

"I can say without a doubt that everyone has a heart to help," Lin said.

Sophomore Jasper Wang showed up on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. What was his motivation?

"When they get a knock on the door and get a box delivered, you can just see the happiness on their faces," he said.



WVUSD Receives Outstanding Credit Rating

Community Tax Bill Lowers for Measure WV

Walnut Valley Unified School District has been rewarded for its continued financial stewardship by Moody's Investors Service. The District's credit rating was upgraded from an Aa2 to an elite Aa1 status in a report issued by the bond credit rating company in February. This is good news for the community as the District begins the process of issuing the first sale of approximately \$43 million in bonds from Measure WV.

"We're really thankful to our community, the Board of Trustees for their leadership, and staff and parents who were instrumental in helping us pass Bond Measure WV," said Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor. "We're at the point now where we'll soon be seeing the dividends of that hard work!" Dr. Taylor said.

The \$153 million general obligation bond was overwhelmingly supported by voters in November 2016.

"Walnut Valley has always had high credit ratings. This new Aa1 rating will result in an advantage for local taxpayers," according to Tim Carty, the District's longtime financial advisor from Piper Jaffray. "We're in the home stretch of delivering a very successful bond sale to the community," Carty reported during the February 21 Board Meeting. "And this is due, in large part, because of the success of the District's credit rating." "Hopefully, this will translate to the lowest interest rates possible on the bonds and the lowest tax burden on taxpayers," he added. "In terms of less interest owed on Measure WV, this will allow us to move future bond sales earlier and cut a year or two of taxation off," Carty said.

Funds are slated to be delivered to the District in April and used to break ground on the first group of construction projects during the summer.



Once each month, C.J. Morris Elementary kindergarten parents are invited to gather in their child's classroom for a 30-minute lesson during Family Learning Friday. Teacher Luisa Salazar offered a session on paragraphs while family members sat side-by-side on the tiny chairs on February 8. The groups then brainstormed the meaning of a paragraph, its structure, and topic sentences, according to the veteran educator. Down the hall, kinder team teachers Kelly Revels and Sarah Sherman focused on early learning reading strategies during their lessons. The new interactive program has garnered a wonderful response, with a bounty of families participating.

"This is a great opportunity to see what our kids are doing and it's working!" said Stephanie Jimenez.

"What we see is the homework side, but when we're here in class, we get a feel for how they're interacting," added parent Robert Ysaac.

The teachers share the techniques they use during instruction so parents can model them at home.

"The kids absolutely love having their parents in the classroom and showing off all the things that they are learning about!" Revels said.

The program is also building the kindergarten community as parents have the opportunity to spend time with one another.

"They mingle and see how other parents interact with their children and maybe even learn a new skill or develop a new friendship with another family," Sherman shared.

The school is also using Family Learning Friday as an opportunity to teach kinder families about the school's International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme, according to coordinator Kelly Howard.

"I think hearing from the teacher how to play a game or what a sentence should look like, and then getting to practice that exact skill is priceless," Sherman said.

Outlook

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR – 2018 SCHOOL HOLIDAYS:
Memorial Day – May 28 • Last Day of School – May 31

3-2-1 Touchdown!

Vejar students take lunar landing challenge

About 100 Vejar Elementary second-graders recently experienced the thrill of being NASA aerospace engineers. Students were tasked with building a lunar lander that could safely land marshmallow astronauts tucked inside paper cup cabins. Their mission was to keep the precious cargo from falling out during a moon landing. Teams of three created their tiny spaceships using simple materials such as construction paper, index cards, straws, and tape. Some groups used straws to attach paper canopies to shield the marshmallows from falling out, while others added helicopter-style paper propellers to slow the landing. A few clever kids even added tiny marshmallows to the bottom of the lunar platforms as an extra layer of fluffy cushion.

"They really enjoy the design process experience and are becoming quite comfortable since the start of our PLTW program," said teacher Giselle Cordova.

Each group named their spaceship and made several test runs, adjusting the designs as needed before the moon landings.

"I'm so proud of what our team created!" commented Isaac Ahn.

Ten Cal Poly Pomona engineering students stopped by to lead the hour-long science lesson on January 18.

"Our goal was to show students the design process for engineers," said senior Vanessa Armenta a member of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers.



"Engineers are given problems, and it is our job to fix them with the knowledge and information we have available to us," she added.

At the end of the building session, youngsters cheered for one another as the college students dropped the lunar landers from different heights where most survived falls from 3-feet and a few even held up from a 6-foot drop.

"It was so great to see students working together to solve a problem," said teacher Laura Saenz.

"Although they felt challenged, they persevered and came up with some interesting ideas! Plus, they had a lot of fun doing it!"

Adventures in Learning

Automation and Robotics Course launches at Suzanne

A new class at Suzanne Middle School is teaching students how the world around them works while learning important skills such as team work, problem-solving, and a don't-give-up attitude. Seventh graders now have the opportunity to take Robotics and Automation classes, as part of the District's STEAM initiative.

The new course is one of several Project Lead The Way (PLTW) classes offered to students from elementary through high school. Students learn about 11 mechanisms, the assemblies that control motion, and how they are used. Mechanisms include chain drive, bevel gear, lead screw, rack and pinion, etc.

"They are used in every single project," said teacher Vicky Silcock. "Students learn what they're used for, how they work, and how they rotate."

The group put their new skills to the test in a survival challenge. Students had to imagine they were the last survivors on Earth with no running water, electricity, and barely any food. Using VEX robotics parts, they built windmills complete with a wood-cutting saw, water pump, and grain grinder to ensure their survival. The project has a real-world application so they can see when and how it is used.

Students navigate their way through gear and drive ratios, reciprocating motion for water pumps, installing tiny input cranks to turn axles on chain drives, output gears that allow windmill blades to rotate clockwise, and more.

"I look forward to this class every day," said Mehki Lin while installing a water pump feature. "I like working with the tools!"

This is not a class where the teacher gives the answer. Silcock provides guidance, but students

must work to solve the challenges on their own. Students collaborate and problem solve, and then document their findings in notebooks. There are no textbooks and instruction is computer-based in the PLTW class.

"We can see a finished product online, but we have to figure out how to get there," said classmate Robert McCormick.

Ian Ceballos utilized a mechanism, gear, and chain drive while working on a pull toy challenge.

"I think this class is preparing us for the future," he said. "We use our imagination. It's a little challenging, but we figure out things on our own."

The class recently created a prototype for a foot orthosis for a child with cerebral palsy during an instant design challenge.

"It was challenging, but we knew it would help other people," McCormick said.

