

Outlook



Issue 56 FALL 2023

Message from the Superintendent



Dear Walnut Valley Educational Community,

Happy Holidays!

As we enter the fall and winter seasons, it is undoubtedly a time for friends, family, and gratefulness. I recently had the opportunity to meet with the 25 students who make up this year's

Superintendent's Student Advisory Council. This amazing team of 5th grade, 8th grade, and high school students from across the District spent part of their morning meeting, and verbally sharing and charting ... "Words that people should say more often to others," such as "Thank you," "I'm sorry," and "Can I help you?" I am truly honored and humbled by our kids.

I also recently rode a school bus across the community with an amazing group of representative parents to empower them to see, firsthand, the new and modernized buildings, as well as the numerous facilities projects, under construction or newly completed, that mostly have been made possible by the community's support of *Measure WV*. I am extremely appreciative of our community's assistance in enabling us to construct and improve upon world-class learning facilities.

In our teacher and support staff *Leadership Development Seminar*, as we do every year at this time, our incredible educators recently read the classic book, *Leadership is an Art*, by Max DePree. In one of his chapters entitled, *Tribal Storytelling*, DePree explains that "every family... [and] every institution needs tribal storytellers to recount their past." He goes on to warn, "The penalty for failing to listen is to lose one's history, one's historical context, one's binding values ... without the continuity brought by [this] custom, any group of people will begin to forget who they are." Thus, in keeping with the spirit of DePree's writings, we followed our discussion of the reading by having Mr. Ray McMullen join our group and "tell stories" about the history of our schools and our organization. Mr. McMullen began working in our schools 70 years ago and, at 91 years of age, continues to serve as a member on the District's Personnel Commission. His stories help to forever document the moments that have influenced, molded, and shaped this amazing organization.

I encourage you to spend time this holiday season with loved ones and perhaps take time to tell the stories that have shaped your family.

With much thanks and appreciation,

Robert P. Taylor, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Global Milestone

WHS Senior Earns Perfect Score on AP Exam

Walnut High School senior Christina Wang has attained a rare perfect score on her 2023 Advanced Placement (AP) Chemistry exam. Christina scored a 5 on her AP exam and then was notified this fall that she got every question correct – an accomplishment made by less than 0.02% of those who take the exam. She joins a select group of just 23 students out of the impressive 141,000 teens around the globe that tackled this demanding college-level examination and earned a flawless score.

Christina credits the achievement to the preparation provided by her chemistry teacher Garrett Lim.

With 18 years of experience, Lim readied his students with multiple review sessions and a mock exam modeled after the actual AP test.

"Taking the official exam was obviously more stressful, but the mock exam gave me the confidence to do my best!" she said.

Christina's outstanding feat was met with excitement by her chemistry teacher. "I'm so proud of this achievement for her!" Lim shared.

"This is definitely a once-in-a-career event but I'm super proud of the effort that the whole class put in as well. Christina exemplifies the diligence of the whole AP class!"

AP exams are scored on a 1-5 scale, and scoring a 5 on an AP exam is the equivalent of getting an A in the corresponding college course. The unrivaled perfect score is obtained by answering every multiple-choice question correctly and scoring the maximum amount of points on every free-response question.



Christina Wang and chemistry teacher, Garrett Lim.

Top 2% in Nation

Diamond Bar, Walnut Ranked Best U.S. High Schools



Diamond Bar and Walnut High Schools are once again showcased among the "Best High Schools in America" in the U.S. News & World Report released August 29.

Nearly 25,000 public high schools across the country were reviewed for the 2023-2024 report.

In this edition, 17,680 schools, including 1,536 in California, earned rankings for exceptional performance in state assessments, graduation rates, and how well they prepare students for college.

Diamond Bar High ranked #25 in Los Angeles Metro High Schools, #62 in California, #427 in the nation, and #108 in STEM high schools.

Walnut High scored #43 in Los Angeles Metro High Schools, #101 in California, #716 in the nation, and #179 in STEM High Schools.

Diamond Bar and Walnut offer an extensive roster of IB and AP courses to provide students with an opportunity to challenge themselves with college-level coursework during high school.

See full report at: <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/national-rankings>.



Best Schools in America

Walnut Valley USD has earned an A+ grade and top 1% ranking out of 12,192 public school districts in America in Niche's 2024 Best Schools and Districts report released September 26.

The District's impressive report card of numerous categories at local, state, and national level, included ranking in the top 6% of all school districts in California. Niche, a leading research website, also placed Diamond Bar and Walnut High Schools in the top 1% of 20,446 high schools in the nation, and top 3% of best high schools in California.

Niche's annual listing is based on an analysis of academic and student life data from the U.S. Department of Education along with test scores, college data, and ratings.

See full report card at: <https://www.niche.com/k12/d/walnut-valley-unified-school-district-ca/>.

Join the Walnut Valley Family!

Now accepting District of Choice applications for Transitional Kindergarten through grade 12 students for the 2024-2025 school year! Learn more about District of Choice (Applications accepted October 4 - December 31, 2023), as well as permit applications for Parent Employment (Allen Bill), Inter-District Transfer Permit, and Caregiver at <https://bit.ly/45Nrn56>. For more information or general inquiries regarding enrollment, please call (909) 595-1261 ext. 31360 or email enroll@wvusd.org.





Bravo!

District Teacher of the Year

Jared Kaitz

For the past seven years, Jared Kaitz's talents as drama teacher, director, writer, set designer, and costumer have continued to expand the Diamond Bar High School theater department by highlighting the incredible talent of students.

Last year, Jared won exclusive rights to produce Disney's "Frozen" and provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for students. He used the occasion to bring awareness to inclusion through carefully designed activities that promote the uniqueness of every student in the Walnut Valley community.

Jared is a one-of-a-kind teacher and director who truly represents what it means to 'Raise the Bar' each and every day!

"Theatre is about celebrating individual strengths and providing tools for everyone to succeed and grow," Jared said. "In my classroom, we embrace diversity and work tirelessly to foster a sense of inclusion in our community."



Staff Kicks Off New School Year

After a three-year pandemic pause, over 1,200 Walnut Valley USD staff members gathered at Calvary Chapel Golden Springs for the annual school year kick off on August 9.

"It is awesome to see all of you today!" announced Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor during his keynote message marking the 53rd anniversary of the school district.

"Thank all of you for making this the greatest school district in the world!"

The popular Welcome Back event featured student entertainment, donated breakfast, raffle prizes, giveaways, and lots of fun.

Staff members cheered, applauded, and waved pompoms as Teachers of the Year, Cornerstone Award winners, Induction Program mentors, and Long Service employees were recognized.

Vejar Elementary custodian Dale Forbes received a standing ovation for completing 40 years of dedicated service.

Walnut High alumna and NBC's "The Voice" first deaf contestant Ali Ibarra thanked staff for their support in a recorded video message and then appeared on stage for a surprise performance.

Vans President Steve Van Doren wowed the packed audience announcing the collaboration of custom WVUSD tennis shoes for employees.

"I love the passion and excitement that all of you show for the new school year!" Van Doren said.

"It is truly a blessing to be a part of the Walnut family, a place where you feel valued and a place where you are a part of the best-dressed educational staff in the world!" shared Chaparral Middle School teacher Sherry Robertson.



Saluting Our Best!

Walnut Valley USD Celebrates 2022/2023 Teachers of the Year

These incredible educators were recognized during the 26th Annual Salute to Teachers awards on October 18. They are truly helping shape a better future that every student deserves!

Tracy Young	Castle Rock Elementary
Pa Di Donato	Chaparral Middle School
Megan Brown	Collegewood Elementary
Megan Cowles	C.J. Morris Elementary
Jared Kaitz	Diamond Bar High
Erika McQuilliams	Evergreen Elementary
Jackie Adishian	Maple Hill Elementary
Alex Surdam	Quail Summit Elementary
Lauren von Hollen	South Pointe Middle School
Marlene Soto	Suzanne Middle School
Lisa Gomez	Vejar Elementary
Carol Cheng	Walnut Elementary
Joe Khouzam	Walnut High
Emmy Tan	Westhoff Elementary

Best in Class!

WVUSD Senior Scholars Named 2024 National Merit Semifinalists

Walnut Valley USD proudly celebrates 15 Diamond Bar and Walnut High School seniors named semifinalists in the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program. These high achieving students represent the top 1% in the country.

Congratulations to the following students:



Diamond Bar High School: Jennifer Cheng, Himansi Gupta, Michael Hu, Angel Huang, Jeremiah Jung, Erdaifu Luo, Owen Ma, Felix Peng, Emily Ren, Dave Zheng, Natalie Zhou, and Michelle Zou.



Walnut High School: Dylan Sham, Phillip Tang, and Aron Wu.

The nationwide pool of approximately 16,000 semifinalists are the highest-scoring entrants in each state. All semifinalists have an opportunity to continue in the competition for some 7,140 National Merit Scholarship awards worth more than \$28 million to be awarded next spring.

Over 1.3 million students entered the 68th annual National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the PSAT Test as juniors which served as the initial screen of program entrants.

To move onto the finalist round, students are judged based on a detailed scholarship application covering their academic record, leadership abilities, employment, participation in school and community activities, and honors and awards received. Students must also write an essay and be recommended by a high school official.



Snapshots of classes in the beautiful new South Pointe Middle School Performing Arts Building with Choir Director AJ Stevens and Instrumental Music Director Susan Willmering. Thank You, Community!

"We are very indebted to our Walnut Valley community for this incredible gift!" Willmering said. "Instantly it has elevated the experience we are able to provide our music students by allowing us versatility for both individualized and large group instruction."

Construction Update



Tax Dollars at Work!

WVUSD to Celebrate 3 Construction Projects at Suzanne Middle School

Walnut Valley USD will host a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new two-story science building and gymnasium at Suzanne Middle School on December 13 at 3:00 p.m.

In addition, construction for the school's new music building will break ground at the celebration.

"This is going to be such a special day for Suzanne!" exclaimed Principal Dr. Amy Smith of the upcoming event.

"Our staff and students are excited to have a campus with updated modern buildings ready for our 21st century learners," she added.

"We truly appreciate our community and WVUSD for making these state-of-the-art facilities a reality!"

Construction projects are funded by Bond Measure WV passed in November 2016.

The 10,000 square-foot science building features 10 STEAM-focused classrooms with collaboration work spaces.

The 12,000 square-foot gymnasium includes interior bleachers, full-size basketball court and two practice courts, volleyball court, wood gym floor, and attached kinesiology workout room.

The Board of Trustees awarded the contract for the nearly \$12.5 million projects, designed by DC Architects, to R.C. Construction Services. Construction commenced in November 2021.

The new 10,000 square-foot Music Building will feature large choir and orchestra classrooms with acoustical panels and drop-down curtains, four practice rooms designed with Quiet Rock, large ensemble room, band, orchestra, and music library



storage rooms, Wenger instrument storage cabinets, and offices. Construction is slated to begin in January 2024.

Instrumental music teachers Ami Garvin and Jeff Blackstone have been involved from the start in designing the rooms to provide the best experience for 400+ music students.

"We are excited to see construction begin and we can't wait to fill the new building with music!" Garvin said.

Walnut High School Gymnasium:

Construction on the new towering 15,700 square-foot gymnasium at Walnut High School is steadily progressing with projected completion in Spring 2024. The \$7.7 million facility will feature full-size basketball, badminton, and volleyball practice courts, scoreboard, bleachers, and weight room.

STEM Education

Walnut High Receives National Recognition as PLTW Distinguished School

Walnut High School has been recognized as a 2022-23 Project Lead The Way (PLTW) Distinguished School for providing broad access to transformative learning opportunities in computer science, engineering, and biomedical science.

Walnut High has offered the rigorous International Baccalaureate Career-Related Programme/Project Lead the Way Biomedical Sciences Program for the past ten years.

"This has been a decade of scientific experimentation, discovery, and innovation!" shared teacher Ellie Blanchard.

Walnut High is one of 262 high schools across the U.S. to receive this honor for increasing student awareness, engagement, and achievement.

The biomedical pathway immerses students in hands-on activities and collaboration to find solutions to real-world challenges.

"This program is about uncovering natural curiosities and developing scientific skills that help students make a difference while building relationships with peers and teachers," Blanchard added.

"Our Class of 2023 has left us feeling inspired to grow the program so we can reach even more students in the next 10 years!"

Walnut High also received the special PLTW Distinguished School designation for the 2019-2020 school year.

In 2013, Walnut High made history as the first in California to offer both IBCC with the Project Lead the Way Biomedical Sciences program as its career-related component.



Being Mindful



Wellness Center Strives to Help Students Thrive

Diamond Bar High School's Wellness Center is dedicated to helping students thrive in their daily lives with innovative opportunities that promote relaxation and mental health support.

Three years ago, the program launched Thrive as a successor to the DB Forum to help students take a break from academic concerns and prioritize their well-being.

Over 90 students joined the half-day wellness forum held in the gymnasium on October 12.

"My philosophy for Thrive is for kids to come and have a positive experience and then leave with strategies to cope with their stress," said Wellness Center Coordinator Denise Mesdjian who leads the event with advanced Peer Counselors.

Thrive offers students a pause from their academic routine, allowing them to explore their emotions and develop valuable insights about themselves.

"Students come away from Thrive feeling more connected to others and more empathetic toward fellow students than they did going in," Mesdjian added.

Attendees are grouped in teams of ten where they embark on a journey of self-discovery and connection.

"We really follow our motto, 'Don't just survive—Thrive' by engaging and inviting students to open up and give themselves permission to feel through

numerous social/emotional learning, trust-building activities, and deep discussions, followed by insightful responses," shared Peer Counseling President senior Aayati Sangal.

"Our peer counselors and Wellness team, alongside the brilliant Mrs. Mesdjian, work very hard to bring Thrive to life and hope that the lessons learned at the event will last a lifetime," Sangal said.

The success of Thrive lies in its ability to create a safe atmosphere for students.

"Thrive is the only event on campus that allows students to examine their feelings and behavior in a supportive and non-judgmental environment," Mesdjian explained.

Thrive is also an opportunity for the newcomers to adjust to high school and make new friends.

"Thrive is a vibrant, safe space that allows students to discover themselves and others," said Peer Counseling Historian junior Ryan Garcia.

A Thrive wellness forum will also be held during the second semester.

"Thrive was a refreshing break from classes that gave me a great learning experience," first-time attendee junior Bowen Tan reflected afterward.

"We got to discuss problems we had with other students and I realized I wasn't alone. We had interesting discussions which helped me think about things in a different way."



Reading is Brewing at CJ Morris!

Fifth Graders Read a Latte at Starbooks Café

Welcome to Starbooks Café! C.J. Morris Elementary fifth grade classes transformed into the world's most popular coffee house with baskets of books, tasty drinks, and donuts on August 24.

The trio of teachers, Megan Cowles, Rachel Harrington and Monica Power, decked out in trademark green aprons as baristas for the annual book-tasting event.

Students sipped on chocolate milk, lemonade, and apple juice (in clear plastic cups with straws, of course!) while munching on sprinkle donuts.

Groups rotated through tables leisurely sampling paperbacks with designated themes including mystery, historical fiction, and biographies.

"We like to host the Starbooks Café early in the year so students can discover the great books we have in our class libraries," Cowles explained.

"And they can start working toward their AR (Accelerated Reader) goals."

The coffee house classrooms were decorated with Reading is Brewing posters, striped paper awnings, menu boards, with jazz music softly playing to set the mood.

"If we like a book we write it down and order it!" shared Romer Gutierrez-Carmona while perusing the autobiography of famed baseball player Roberto Clemente.

"I've already picked out four books!" said Jason Pham sitting at the graphic novel table.

"I'm waiting to go to the biography table because I really like those kinds of books," added classmate Sophya Cortez.

"This is one of my favorite events - I love bringing the joy of reading to our students!" Harrington shared.

Women in Leadership

Suzanne Middle School Principal Dr. Amy Smith launched the innovative Women in Leadership (WIL) seminar in Walnut Valley USD.

"The goal was to create an atmosphere of trust, learning, and awareness to issues that women are experiencing in their careers," Smith said of the group now in its second year.

WIL consists of 20 women in leadership positions including assistant principals, principals, directors, assistant superintendents, and more.

The all-female group also provides networking opportunities through guest speakers and conferences.

After completing her dissertation in 2018, the educational leader continued to research and learn about the topic of female leadership and the journey that colleagues and mentors have taken in advancing their careers.

In 2021, Smith also had the privilege of speaking at the International Leadership Association Global Conference of the importance of empowering other women to pursue their goals.

Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor encouraged Smith to develop the WIL program after reading her research and dissertation highlights.

"Working with Dr. Taylor, we wanted the women in the group to know they were part of something special, which meant wanting to provide an experience unlike anything we have done prior," Smith said.

This fall, her article "Empowered Women Empower Women" was featured in the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Leadership Magazine

On November 6, Superintendent Taylor recognized Smith for her outstanding achievement with a keepsake framed article signed by all WIL members.

Read at: <https://leadership.acsa.org/empowered-women-empower-women>.



Outlook WALNUT VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Let's Talk! – We want to be responsive to your needs and invite you to send questions, comments, and suggestions to www.wvusd.org.

Back to Class! School Begins in Walnut Valley USD



Quail Summit Elementary lived up to its reputation as the "school with a heart" ushering in the 2023/2024 school year with a parade.

Teachers assembled to welcome hundreds of students and families with cheers, hugs, and high fives as they filed through the Monday, August 14 procession. The children beamed as they were greeted individually before the first bell at 8:20 a.m.

"This is a long-standing tradition that is loved by many!" shared Principal Nicole Hernandez.

"I can't decide who was more excited, our students or their parents. My favorite part is it reinforces that each student belongs at Quail Summit."

About 13,700 students began classes at the 15 campuses in Walnut Valley USD.

At C.J. Morris Elementary, families gathered to take commemorative snapshots and select a sweet treat at the popular donut wall. Fifth grade teacher Rachel Harrington welcomed students to a Hogwarts Celebration in her Harry Potter-themed classroom.

"We have a party, take a sorting quiz, and spend time catching up with friends and getting to know each other," she said.

"It brightens up their day and makes the first day of school that much more special!"

Westhoff Elementary families marked opening day with Oscar-worthy VIP photos posing with movie scene clapboards.

"It was nothing but bright smiles and positive energy," shared Principal Dr. Rosa Northcott.

"Our amazing Community Club literally rolled out the red carpet for our students!"

Walnut Valley USD has Transitional Kindergarten (TK) classrooms at every elementary school to support the youngest students with academic, social, and whole-child development.

"TK students learn and develop independence in a nurturing, engaging, interactive learning



environment," said Dr. Jeanette Koh, administrative director of Educational Services.

In Walnut Elementary School's new TK classroom, teacher Jennifer Ghaneian read the silly "How Will I Get to School This Year?" to the children gathered on colorful carpet squares. The four-year-olds giggled as pages turned with playful images of a child jumping with frogs and riding on the back of an elephant.

"This first week of school is such a special time in TK because for many students this is their first experience in school," Ghaneian explained.

"My focus right now is building a foundation that school is fun and making learning joyful and playful!"

At Diamond Bar High, "The Epic Adventure Begins" USB first day rally featured spirit competitions, Thundering Herd band, pep, and dance performances.



"DBHS loves kicking off our school year with a pep rally," said USB advisor Janna Van Horn.

"We want our Brahmas to be excited about the school year and know that this is a great place to be from day one. We are happy to be back and can't wait for a fun year!"

"It was the best first day ever!" reported Chaparral Middle School Principal Dr. Robby Jung who was out helping students find their classes during passing periods.

"There really is a special feeling in the air this time of year as all of our students and staff get ready for the learning journey ahead," he said.



At Walnut High, ASB, Blue Thunder band, and the cheer squad welcomed students back to school.

"I'm looking forward to a lot of the senior events we have planned including the senior sunrise, senior sunset, grad night, and senior night for swim," shared ASB member Julian Garcia.

"Now that I'm an upperclassman, I am especially excited for rallies and this will be my first year attending prom!" added junior Pitzil Avila-Castellanos.