

Outlook



Issue 55 SUMMER 2023



Castle Rock Elementary Celebrates 60th Anniversary

It was a joyful walk down memory lane as Castle Rock Elementary commemorated its 60th anniversary on March 30.

Former principals, teachers, staff, alumni, and parents joined in celebration for the milestone event. Even the rainy weather didn't dampen spirits of the party that moved inside and live-streamed for students and teachers viewing in classrooms.

"Castle Rock is a very special place for all of us and in our hearts forever!" said host retired administrator and former Castle Rock principal, Jackie Brown, who served as interim principal this year.

The school opened on October 1, 1962 with 362 students in 12 portables under the direction of Principal Barney Davis.

Castle Rock earned the prestigious International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme title in 2006 through the vision of former Superintendent Dr. Ron Hockwalt.

"At that time, there were only three schools in the state (including WVUSD sister school C.J. Morris Elementary) and 60 in the country," Brown said.

"It really put Castle Rock on the map!"

A group of students from all grade levels kicked off the program performing an original "Castle Rock is Amazing" song to the tune of "Encanto".

"Today is a reunion of so many people that have made such a difference here at Castle Rock," said Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor.

"As I look around and see all our Castle Rock friends with smiling faces – this is going to be a wonderful time," Brown said.

The multipurpose room was brimming with six decades of historical photos, news clippings, and memorabilia displayed on paneled columns and tables.



"We hope you will reminisce, laugh, and enjoy the pictures through the decades and artifacts on display," Brown said.

And the school's legacy continues with three alumni teachers' daughters currently teaching at the school.

Retired 38-year veteran teacher Jody Brown now enjoys "giving back" in daughter Christa Richard's transitional kindergarten (TK) classroom. Brown also sifted through hundreds of photos assembling the 60th anniversary display.

"I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for all of the staff, children and memories that have shaped our lives," she said.

First in State!

Diamond Bar High's 'Frozen' Melts Hearts During Sold Out Run

With true Disney fanfare, Diamond Bar High Drama Department presented a spectacular production of "Frozen: The Broadway Musical."

"Frozen" sisters Anna and Elsa, adorable snowman Olaf, and a cast of characters made their very first debut on a high school stage in California. Every seat in the theater was filled with captivated audiences of all ages during eight sold out performances in April. An extra Saturday matinee was even added and tickets were snapped up within a matter of hours.

"This has been a dream come true and an incredible opportunity for all of us!" said Drama teacher and director Jared Kaitz who took on the "monster" challenge of bringing Disney magic to life.

A dedicated cast and crew, comprised of 200 students and musicians, rehearsed every afternoon for nearly four months.

"Frozen" featured sensational special effects, stunning sets, over 200 costumes and 50 wigs (many handmade by Kaitz himself), and powerhouse performances. Cast members jumped at the chance to appear in the Disney musical they grew up with.

"When I think about this show, it will stand out in a league of its own," shared junior Eden Wright, 17, who starred as Elsa, the queen of Arendelle with the icy magic power.

"I've been a Disney fan since I was a little girl and knew this was something I just had to do!" added junior Jovani Suviate who portrayed Elsa's younger sister, Anna.

Jovani especially loved seeing all the children that came to watch the show.

"This has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience!"

Junior Alexis Chisholm, 16, played Olaf, a tricky role which involved maneuvering a three-foot-tall snowman puppet while singing and dancing.

"Walking onstage and hearing kids scream 'It's Olaf!' warmed my heart and made me so happy because



I was making the kids happy," she said.

"I never expected to ever be in such a huge production, surrounded by all these talented, kind, and supportive people," said senior Aeron McCoy, 17, who played Anna in the dual-cast leading role.

"Every rehearsal was full of fun and laughter, but also passion and commitment," she added.

When Kaitz, a Diamond Bar High alumnus, heard there was a contest for one high school in every state to win the production rights to "Frozen" – he applied right away. In September, Diamond Bar High was granted exclusive rights to present the hit Disney musical. Winners of The United States of Frozen: Love is an Open Door nationwide contest were chosen based on their unique artistic vision of "Frozen" and commitment to diversity and inclusion outreach in the schools and local communities.

Diamond Bar High held matinee activities for children, WVUSD Unique as a Snowflake Showcase, Frozen Friday Updates, community outreach performances, Disneyland Resort "Frozen Costume Collaboration" partnership, and much more.

"Frozen" is ultimately about the power of love and ability to bring people together, something on display each day in the school's theater department.

"This is a place where they can be themselves, they don't have to hide behind a mask," said Kaitz.

"This whole environment has been so welcoming," said Jovani, 17, said of her first high school theatrical experience.

"Everyone's so kind and generous - there are no differences and everyone feels appreciated."

Message from the Superintendent



Dear Walnut Valley Educational Community,

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time." John Lubbock (Author)

For many, the midpoint of summer brings with it the opportunity for family time, perhaps a sense of temporarily "slowing things down," and reflection. I know our students and staff members need to utilize this "break" from school to simply watch the clouds float by and/or listen to the murmur of the water. As a parent, I too understand the importance of parents finding a break from the hustle of the school day ... and thus, I encourage all of us, if and when possible, to relax with family and friends and enjoy the season. At unprecedented levels and from all aspects of the world, the research on the need to find balance and focus on the mental well-being of our kids and ourselves is overwhelmingly clear. I also find this to be a natural time of year for reflection and celebration. Our recent graduation ceremonies, promotions, and awards programs demonstrated what amazing students and schools we have in Walnut Valley. Perhaps in no other community do 100 percent of 12th graders graduate from high-performing high schools like Walnut High School and Diamond Bar High School. Where else can you sit at a school like Walnut High School and listen to the first two student graduate speakers share that they'll be heading to Stanford and Harvard respectively. Where else can you spend the end of the school year watching the musical production of *Frozen* like at Diamond Bar High School ... the only high school in California awarded the rights to Disney's prize piece. As this publication is being produced, all three of our middle schools are, once again, in Washington, D.C., to accept the prestigious National Schools to Watch Award ... making Walnut Valley Unified School District one of the only school districts in America where all of the middle schools are nationally recognized. And perhaps in no other community are the elementary schools honored for their service to their community and the manner in which they treat others ... as they are here in Walnut Valley. It's a wonderful time for reflection in Walnut Valley.

Summer also brings a time for looking ahead into the future. I'm excited about the possibilities that lie in the upcoming school year. As the late investigative journalist Charles Bowden shared: "Summer is always the best of what might be."

I'm encouraged by the state-of-the-art facilities that continue to develop and I look forward to the new beginnings at places like Suzanne Middle School that will be opening a new science classroom building and gymnasium sometime in the fall (and breaking ground on a new music building) or Walnut High School that is in the midst of building a new gymnasium and planning for a complete revision to an ultra-modern library...just to name a couple of examples. Thanks again to our community for your support of Measure WV and making all of this progress possible for our students! I'm encouraged by our school leaders, including our newest additions who will be joining our amazing group of principals. Just recently, we announced that David Hong, who spent nearly 30 years as an instructional leader at Diamond Bar High School before leaving us for the past four years to serve as a Director with the College Board and the Advanced Placement Program at the national level, will be returning as Principal at Diamond Bar High School. Jennifer Veneracion, who spent 17 years as a teacher and instructional leader at CJ Morris Elementary School before leaving to take an administrative position in another school district, will rejoin us as the new Principal at CJ Morris. Our amazing students continue to be in supportive environments thanks to our teachers, support staff, and leaders. So, once again, please take time this summer to relax, reflect, and maybe even be inspired about the future. It always goes quick ... as William Shakespeare wrote: "Summer's lease hath all too short a date."

Take care and enjoy! I appreciate your continued support of our students.

Robert P. Taylor, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Congratulations!

CLASS OF 2023

We're proud to spotlight eight of our stellar Class of 2023 seniors! These super star students represent the best in Walnut Valley with dedication and commitment to academic excellence and a wide variety of extracurricular activities.

Diamond Bar High



Aaron Chang
Stanford University, 4.0 GPA
 Taken 12 AP Courses. Principal Clarinet NAFME All-National Honor Band and SCBOA All-Southern Symphony Orchestra, DBHS Wind Ensemble, Symphony Orchestra, and Performing Arts Academy.
"DBHS helped me develop a strong work ethic that will continue to be a part of me for years to come. Along with the values of hard work, DBHS showed me the importance of community and collaboration with one another."



Amber Cui
University of California, Berkeley Haas School of Business, 4.0 GPA
 Taken 15 AP Courses, All-Southern and All-State Honor Musician, International Leadership Foundation Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award, Scholastic Art and Writing Award.
"WVUSD has done an excellent job of shaping me into the open-minded and highly ambitious person I am today. With daunting ambitions in the business and startup world, I hope to give back to this community soon!"



Leann Mu
University of Southern California – Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, 4.0 GPA
 Taken 9 AP Courses, AP Scholar with Distinction, DBHS Drumline co-captain, California Scholarship Federation treasurer, Brahma Tech Academy, Women in STEM, DBHS HOSA.
"The DBHS Drumline was more than a musical percussion ensemble – they were my second family. From playing at rallies to Friday night football games, everything with them has created memorable events that I will never forget!"



Joseph Wangsa
Texas A&M at College Station, 3.83 GPA
 Taken 10 AP Courses, CASMEC All-State Honor Band, SCSBOA All-Southern Honor Band, AP Scholar with Distinction, Drum Major, Principal Bass Clarinet, Drama, Choir, Dronescape Club.
"The closing night of 'Frozen' was the most meaningful memory to me. It really signaled the end of my time at DBHS and also revealed more opportunities I can pursue in the future!"

Walnut High



Hudson Kaleb Dy
California Institute of Technology, 3.98 GPA
 Taken 8 AP Courses, Nation Merit Finalist, All-League Academic Swim and Water Polo, AP Scholar with Distinction, ASB Student Board Representative, Varsity Swim captain, Operation Smile president, Varsity Water Polo.
"The WHS environment emphasized hard work and discipline while also stressing the importance of mental health. This culture instilled many important pillars in me including kindness, humility, and willingness to help."



Margaret Lee
Harvard University, 4.0 GPA
 Taken 7 AP Courses, AP Scholar with Distinction, 2023 U.S. Presidential Scholar Candidate, The Hoofprint editor-in-chief, Key Club president, Speech and Debate Club captain, Mock Trial captain, Model United Nations, Varsity Tennis.
"I have learned to be resilient, dedicated, and a life-long learner at WHS. And as I brave the real world, I know that the lessons of my teachers, friends, and school community will help me navigate my future."



Shani Su
Stanford University, 4.0 GPA
 Taken 12 AP Courses, National Merit Finalist, President's Volunteer Service Award, National FBLA Awards, Interact Club president, FBLA president, Dreamcatchers Club president, Publications, Speech and Debate Club.
"WHS has always taught me to chase my dreams. If I hope to make a global impact in the future, I have learned to dream big and be confident in my skills. WHS has instilled in me the character necessary to be a successful leader."



Jadon Zhu
University of California, Los Angeles, 4.0 GPA
 Taken 5 AP Courses, IBCP Diploma Candidate, USA Biology Olympiad Semifinalist, National Merit Finalist, AP Scholar with Honor, Plant Mars co-president, Neuroscience Club vice president, Chess Club.
"WHS offers a rigorous STEM curriculum and forward-thinking English department. The IB Career-related Programme and high-level courses taught me what it's like to think from a global perspective and work diligently to that end."

Congrats, Class of 2023!

Walnut Valley USD Seniors Graduate to New Heights

It's time to say goodbye to the nearly 1,200 graduating seniors from the Walnut Valley USD. Walnut High School presented its 53rd commencement ceremony with traditional pomp and circumstance on May 25 at the Ken Gunn Stadium. Following years of hard work, the 525 seniors were excited to don the blue gowns with gold-tasseled caps marking their final chapter in high school. A trio of commencement speakers took the stage during the celebration of academic achievement.

Valedictorian Shani Su reflected that the global pandemic "wreaked havoc" on their high school experience.

"We were hit by the 9th grade shut down, 10th grade distance learning, 11th grade mask restrictions, and 12th grade semi-return to normality," she commented.

"It's been a long and winding road with unexpected twists and potholes along the way. But, hey we made it – congrats!"

"I am proud to say that I will remember you all and cherish these memories that I have made here at Walnut High School," shared senior speaker Skylar Baisden.

"I'd like to tell you all to go boldly, to remember that

the real world is like the night sky – the possibilities are absolutely limitless," added valedictorian Margaret Lee.

"To my fellow Class of 2023 graduates, embrace your potential, be kind, love fiercely, express your gratitude, (special shout out to my Mom), have pride in yourself, and shine brightly!"

Principal Dr. Ryan Maine took the reins as the school's leader during the graduating class's freshman year.

"As we say goodbye, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for an extraordinary four-year journey here at Walnut High School!" Maine said before seniors received their diplomas.

"Your sense of humor, unwavering resiliency, and impact you've made as an exceptional group will forever hold a special place in my heart. To the remarkable Class of 2023, thank you for everything!"

At Diamond Bar High School, 649 Brahmas participated in the 40th commencement ceremony held at the Walt Holmes Stadium. Both premier high schools report an outstanding 100% graduation rate!



Super Star Teachers!

DBHS Teacher Earns National Title

Congratulations to Diamond Bar High School math instructor Lisa Arionus who recently earned National Board Certification.



She joins an elite group of only 3% of teachers across the United States who have received the classification.

National Board Certification is the most respected professional certification available in education and is designed to develop, retain and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide.

Thank you, Lisa for "Raising the Bar" for yourself, your students, and Diamond Bar High School!

Making a Difference Award

Walnut High teacher and head volleyball coach Charles Tran was named the East San Gabriel Valley SELPA Making a Difference Award recipient on April 21. This is a highly prestigious honor in the East San Gabriel Valley SELPA that is comprised of 15 school districts. Tran was recognized for his exceptional work as an Education Specialist and unwavering commitment to promoting inclusion among his students. He has also fostered strong relationships with both educators and students, demonstrating a true passion for his work. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition and for making such a positive impact on the lives of students!



Construction Update

Building projects made possible through the support of Measure WV. Thank You, Community!



Walnut Valley USD marked the official opening of the new South Pointe Middle School Performing Arts Building on April 19. The ribbon-cutting ceremony signaled completion of the nearly \$5.2 million construction project funded by voter support of Bond Measure WV passed in 2016. The celebration was attended by parents, teachers, staff, students, community members, and local officials.

"As you can tell by the special guests in attendance today, this grand opening means a lot to so many," said Principal Dr. Matthew Brummett.

"This facility is a testament to our shared commitment to the education and arts in Walnut Valley!"

The South Pointe choir, under the direction of AJ Stevens, kicked off the event with the "National Anthem" followed by a

South Pointe Performing Arts Building Opens

clarinet quartet performance of "Pink Panther."

"It is our hope that this building will provide a hub for creativity and cultural events in our community offering a wide range of performances, concerts, plays, and exhibitions," Brummett said.

The 10,000 square-foot building features the latest in sound, lighting, and acoustics allowing for a world-class performing arts venue.

"Buildings like this will impact the students in our community for decades and decades – and we can't thank you enough for providing that!" said Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor.

Instrumental Music Director Susan Willmering said it was "humbling" being a part of the building's planning process.

"I still have the first sketch trying to figure out what our dream home would look like and how it would function," she said.

"And now to see it built is unreal!"

Choirs and bands began practicing in the building the week prior to the grand opening.

"It is a game changer for us!" Willmering said.

"For the first time, we have space to move around during

rehearsal, with excellent acoustics, and we can give much better feedback to students."

"We are very excited for the future and are indebted to the community for this gift."

After the ceremony, visitors toured the state-of-the-art facility that features expansive band and choir rooms with 24-foot-tall ceilings, ensemble rooms, instrument storage rooms, practice rooms, and music library.

"This new building will help us remain inspired as we grow as musicians," said student speaker Emma Li, a 7th grade Chamber Singers choir member.

"In this new facility, we know the sky's the limit for us," added 7th grade Band President Megan Liu.

"From the bottom of our hearts, thank you to each and every person that played a part in making this possible!"



New Walnut Elementary Multipurpose, Classroom Building Complete

The new 7,500 square-foot building features three 21st century learning classrooms: one Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and two 5th grade, with adjoining multipurpose room.

"We are very excited to finally be in this room!" exclaimed Walnut Elementary Principal Robert Chang during the ribbon-cutting ceremony held May 17.

"This building really symbolizes growth on our campus," said Chang noting that the school's enrollment will exceed 700 students next year.

"We are staying current by providing a new TK program and new classrooms for our established Dual Language Immersion (DLI)," Chang added.

The nearly \$7.3 million construction project was funded by voter support of Bond Measure WV.

Parents, teachers, staff, students, community members, and local officials joined the grand opening event.

"This new MPR is a wonderful accomplishment for Walnut Elementary," said Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor of the plan years in the making.

"I want to thank the community for your support!"



"This new building demonstrates how our community truly embodies the Kids First motto," said fifth grade DLI English teacher Chris Moon who will be moving into a new classroom.

"We will now have bright, open, air conditioned, indoor space for practices, with no more performance distractions – whether it's the sun, rain, or train!" Moon said.

"This new building will be the heart of so many

new events and opportunities for our students."

"I can't wait to get the keys to my brand-new classroom and begin setting up the class environment for my 24 four-year-old students," said inaugural TK teacher Jennifer Ghaneian.

"We are grateful to have this beautiful space for our students to start their educational journey."

"We have grown so much that a whole new building needed to be added to our campus!" announced Elementary Learning Specialist Jill Takayama who began sitting in on



planning meetings with her baby, Lily, who is now nine years old.

"Thank you for being a part of our journey so that children, like my own, can call Walnut Elementary home."

After the ceremony, visitors toured the expansive state-of-the-art facility with open concept ceilings.

"I hope the future kids will make great memories here!" said fifth grade DLI student speaker Aleya Wilds who effortlessly greeted the audience in Mandarin.

"Our fifth graders are the first class to graduate in the MPR," said student speaker Viviana Giannone.

"I'm glad we get to see what it looks like and spend our last few days as elementary students here!"



Band Buddies is Back Celebrating 10th Anniversary

Walnut High band members mentor young musicians

Over 115 Walnut Valley USD fifth-grade musicians took the stage with their Band Buddies' mentors during the Walnut High School spring concert on April 14 in the Performing Arts Center. During four rehearsals, led by

instrumental music directors Corey Wicks and Katie Takahashi, about 50 members of the Blue Thunder Marching Band sat side-by-side with the young artists in the 10,000 square-foot instrumental music facility. The popular outreach program returned in March after a three-year pandemic hiatus.

"Band Buddies has been one of the most rewarding things we have done at Walnut High School," Wicks said.

"During the Band Buddies era, we have had the privilege of watching our students grow and mature not only during their high school years, but also starting from the fifth grade and beyond."

Wicks shared that group music activities give students an unrivaled sense of community, which is more important today than ever before.

"For us to be able to include them in this community even earlier is an extraordinary gift! We cannot thank the district and school site administrators, music teachers, and parents for giving us their undying support in this endeavor."

"Band Buddies started as a small idea and over the last 12 years, has turned into a passion project," said Takahashi who created the outreach program as a Walnut High sophomore.

The experience inspired her to become a music teacher and she is now in her sixth year as a full-time director.

"Band Buddies is my favorite part about teaching music in WVUSD! I'm so thrilled to welcome Band Buddies back to the stage tomorrow evening!" she added.

Participants received a commemorative 10th anniversary t-shirt and snacks during each rehearsal.

"I hope that Band Buddies leaves a lasting impact on these fifth-grade students, just as it did for me when I was a fifth grade Band Buddy," said senior Band Buddies President Anthony Chae.

"Not only in their potential future with music, but I hope it will also provide them with memories and experiences that will shape the kids into amazing people."

"Band Buddies sparked my love for performing music, and now, as a mentor, I strive to be that spark for the next generation of Mustangs!" shared freshman clarinetist Keegan Beecher.

Small Actions Matter! Students Act for a Better Environment

Evergreen Elementary 4th grader Jerry Cao, a local Ambassador for the Ashley Lashley Foundation, has been encouraging classmates to find ways to create a better environment for themselves and others.

"Let's work together and make the world a clean world!" Jerry said while teaching his class about climate change during a May presentation.

"The Earth is not so healthy and we can change that by figuring out some solutions," the 10-year-old explained.

The fourth graders created an action plan that included making posters to encourage students on campus to throw their trash away.

"If we litter, it goes to the ocean and hurts ocean animals!" he said.

"Jerry's been a leader in our classroom and an inspiration to all of us!" praised teacher Erin Ruhl.

On May 16, students hung their posters around the campus and picked up litter.

"I thought this project was a perfect example of our Walnut Valley USD motto: Take Care of Yourself, Each Other, and The Team!" Ruhl said.





Walnut Valley Educational Foundation

A Night of Stars WVEF Gala Celebrates Education

The Walnut Valley Educational Foundation “Night of Stars” Gala held April 27 at the Diamond Bar Center lauded exemplary parents, alumni, business, education, leadership, and service partners.

Distinguished Parent Partners awards were presented to Katia Alsayed - Castle Rock Elementary, Billy Fermin - Cyrus J. Morris Elementary, Katie Daher - Collegewood Elementary, Mona Hwang - Evergreen Elementary, Nicole Smith - Maple Hill Elementary, Angie Yung-Yuey - Quail Summit Elementary, Amy DeYampert - Vejar Elementary, Natalie Liu - Walnut Elementary, Ashley Chau - Westhoff Elementary, Kim Alegado - Chaparral Middle School, Angie Chiao - South Pointe Middle School, Naomi Jang - Suzanne Middle School, Tjieu Ngoc (Chang) - Diamond Bar High, and Venessa Lopez - Walnut High.

Distinguished Partner Awards were presented to Rachel Scott, Senior Congressional Correspondent, ABC News, Diamond Bar High Class of 2011 - Alumni, Theresa Lee, CEO, TRK Customs Services, Inc. - Business Partner, Bob and Michelle Sun, Owners, Chick-fil-A City of Industry - Community Partner, WVUSD Dual Language Immersion Program - Education Partner, and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Walnut/Diamond Bar Station - Service Partner.

“It’s our city and our school district that set the foundation for the career I have now,” said Rachel Scott, an Emmy-award winning alumni honoree in a video message from the nation’s capital.

“To the teachers, faculty, and staff, thank you for pouring into students like me every step of the way!”

Outlook WALNUT VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
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2023-24 SCHOOL
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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.



Quail Summit Elementary second graders entered a world of pure imagination during Wonka Day on May 23. Classrooms were transformed with candy decorations, boxes of yummy Wonka bars, even a few Oompa Loompas joined the party.

Teacher Kaity Adamo donned a curly wig, top hat, bow tie, and purple jacket as the famed chocolatier Willy Wonka (played by Gene Wilder) from the 1971 classic film. The creative STEM activities included Candy Creations, All the Bubbles, Nautical Nightmare, Don't Get Trapped, and the Great Candy Drop.

Students used the four-step engineering design process: plan, create, test, and improve during the Don't Get Trapped activity on May 23. The classroom buzzed with creativity and collaboration as children created mazes out of sticky soft candy.

“Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” was our final read aloud in second grade and I wanted my students to go into summer with a fresh memory of how much fun learning can be,” Adamo said.

“My hope is that they will always remember the engaging and magical learning experiences I created for them this year!”

National News

Champion Speller Makes Second Appearance at Scripps National Spelling Bee

Chaparral Middle School eighth-grader Justin Tran advanced to the third round of the Scripps National Spelling Bee on Tuesday, May 30, topping his performance from last year.



Justin correctly spelled renminbi, the official currency of the People's Republic of China, in the first round, then correctly answered his second-round multiple-choice word meaning question, “Something described as reverberant:” selecting “tends to repeat in echoes.”

Champions spell their way through classroom, school, and regional spelling bees with the hope of making it to the country's premiere spelling competition.

Justin was eliminated in the first round of the 2022 bee when he misspelled catjang, a plant in the pea family native to Africa.

“It was very surreal competing in the 2022 Scripps National Spelling Bee, and although I didn't make it far, I had a great time doing it,” Justin told the City News Service.

“I learned that you can never be too prepared for something and you should be careful to always do your best.”

This year's bee began with a field of 231 spellers from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, the Bahamas, Germany and Ghana. The national bee has four rounds: the preliminaries, the quarterfinals, semifinals and finals. Justin was eliminated during the quarterfinals on Wednesday, May 31. He was one of 56 spellers, including five Southern California students, who progressed that far at the contest held in Oxon Hill, Maryland.

“My family has played a huge role in my spelling journey,” he said. “They help me study, cheer me on, and are always there when I need them.”

“During our study sessions and mock spelling bees, Justin is the only student that never missed a word, for two years in a row,” Chaparral teacher and bee coordinator Pa Di Donato said.

“But what stands out about Justin is not just his talent for spelling but his humility. Although he is way ahead of the game, he shows up for every single meeting, supporting and encouraging his school mates.”

Cereal Box Domino Challenge

Schoolwide physics activity culminates with over 500 boxes of cereal donated to food bank

Castle Rock Elementary students had fun while helping others during the Cereal Box Domino Challenge held on May 10. Third grade classes at the IB World School sponsored the event as an action for the Forces and Motion planner. For the culminating physics activity, all students were asked to bring in an unopened box of cereal. At 8:30 a.m., the children began strategically lining up the boxes to create a giant domino chain.

“Students were quick to make sure the spacing of the boxes was perfect, and some even brought out rulers!” shared third grade teacher Michelle Boots.

At Principal Dr. Elizabeth Chang's signal, students counted down and the first boxes were pushed over beginning a double ripple that weaved through the campus. Students cheered as the chain of falling cereal boxes passed by their classrooms.

“This event brought the whole school together in such a fun way!” Boots said.

The idea for the domino train was based on third grade's recent learning of Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion.



“Our Castle Rock community was very generous in donating the cereal boxes,” Boots added.

In total, 502 boxes of cereal were collected and delivered to a local food bank.

“I'm so proud of our IB citizens,” Chang said.

“To see the boxes fall perfectly was amazing!” exclaimed third grader Nicole Park.

“It was awesome watching the cereal domino challenge and seeing Newton's Third Law of Motion in action,” said third grader Jacob Lara.

“For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction!” WATCH VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/euT4d-GqNzc>

Alumna Becomes First Deaf Singer on NBC's 'The Voice'

Walnut Valley USD alumna Alyssa “Ali” Ibarra is proudly using the national stage to share her message of defying the odds.

During her blind audition for this season's NBC “The Voice”

singing competition, celebrity judges were in awe after learning the 24-year-old soulful singer was born deaf in both ears and deemed that she had a “superpower!”

Ali joined Team Kelly (Clarkson) becoming the first deaf singer to appear on the Emmy-Award-winning television show. The 2016 Walnut High School graduate also attended Suzanne Middle School and Collegewood Elementary. On April 11, she surprised Suzanne drama students to share her story, perform songs, and offer behind-the-scenes details about her journey on “The Voice.”

“Whatever you want to do, you can do it as long as you keep working hard for it!” the pitch-perfect singer said to the group of seventh and eighth graders.

“Not only is Ali extremely talented, but she is one of the kindest and most sincere people I have ever been blessed to know,” said math and drama teacher Helen Papadopoulos.



“Ali is a wonderful example of knocking down obstacles and chasing your dreams no matter what. We love her so much and are incredibly proud of what she has accomplished!”

During an April 18 hometown visit, Ali performed at alma mater Walnut High School accompanied by Social Studies teacher Justin Panlilio in the packed Performing Arts Center.

“What she's doing for the community is awesome!” Panlilio said.

“Ali's showing if you have a disability, turn it into ability.”

The audience sung along with cell phone flashlights, then lined up after the show for photos and autographs.

The inspirational alum also made a special appearance at Collegewood's Candyland Festival and performed the National Anthem during Suzanne's promotion ceremony on May 25.

Despite facing the challenge of being deaf, Ali has embraced her uniqueness and transformed it into her greatest strength. And it has fueled her creativity and determination.

“I'm never going to let my disability stop me!” she said.