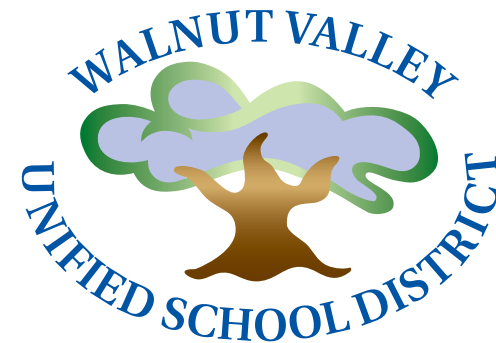


# Outlook



Issue 58 SUMMER 2024

## Message from the Superintendent



Dear Walnut Valley Educational Community,

As we conclude another successful academic year, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the remarkable achievements

of our students, teachers, and staff. Throughout the past several months, we have witnessed numerous milestones and events, including heartwarming graduation ceremonies and engaging end-of-year activities, which have brought our community together in celebration and pride.

This year, our District embraced the theme of "Tashi Deley," a Tibetan greeting that translates to "I honor the greatness in you." This powerful message has served as a reminder that each individual brings unique qualities and perspectives to our community. We have focused on fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone can thrive, honoring the benefit in our diverse population.

This publication is, once again, full of stories that highlight the greatness in our students (including our amazing graduating Seniors), our facilities (as the world-class renovations and new construction continue ... I want to, again, say "thanks" to our supportive community), our schools (from Distinguished Schools to service-oriented student bodies), and finally, our incredible staff members (perhaps most notably, Kelli Gile, who is retiring after 25 years of service as our District's public information specialist and the editor of the Outlook).

As we move forward, let us continue to appreciate and celebrate our differences, acknowledging that they enrich our community and contribute to a vibrant educational experience for all.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and I eagerly anticipate another year of growth and collaboration as we empower our students to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,  
**Robert P. Taylor, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent

## BRAVO to Best in State!

### Chaparral Tapped as 2024 California Distinguished School

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond announced that Chaparral Middle School is among the 293 exemplary middle and high schools selected as 2024 California Distinguished Schools.

The exceptional schools recognized this year are illustrative of the persistence and promise of California's students, educators, and schools.

"This award is a testament to the steadfast commitment, skilled work, and thoughtful decisions that foster student learning each and every day," said Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor.

"Congratulations to our shining educators, counselors, staff, students, and parents!"

Chaparral was previously recognized as a California Distinguished School in 1994 and 1998 and California Gold Ribbon School in 1995.

To select the state's highest award, the California



Department of Education uses multiple measures to identify eligible schools based on their performance on the state indicators as specified on the California School Dashboard.

The selection process involves a rigorous evaluation based on academic achievement, school climate, and efforts to address achievement gaps.

"It is my pleasure to honor and recognize these 293 secondary schools for their efforts to provide exemplary public education to all students," Thurmond said in the February 29 news release.

"Excellent middle schools and high schools play a critical role in the life outcomes of our young people," Thurmond said.

"This year's California Distinguished Schools celebration provides us with an opportunity to recognize the hard work of our secondary educators and school staff who help our young adults discover passions and access college and career-ready experiences that will propel them through life."

The 2024 California Distinguished Schools were recognized on May 3 at the Disneyland Hotel.



## Walnut High Receives Green Ribbon School Award

Walnut High School recently achieved a significant milestone by receiving a silver level California Green Ribbon School award from the California Department of Education. This recognition highlights the school's commitment to effective environmental education, reduced environmental impacts, and improved health and wellness within the school community. Led by sophomore Elise Chen and supported by Environmental Science Teacher Kathy May, Operations Manager Conchita Cawley, and Director of Maintenance Sam Sornoso, Walnut High School stood out among 41 schools nationwide at the award ceremony held at Claremont High School on April 30.

The school's efforts focused on multiple fronts, including sustainable landscaping with drought-resistant plants like California lilac and Baja fairy duster. This not only beautifies the campus but also reduces water consumption and carbon emissions. Complementing these efforts, Walnut implemented a food composting system under Kathy May's guidance, turning food waste into organic fertilizers for school gardens. Additionally, water conservation measures such as low-flow fixtures, limited watering hours, and

rainwater utilization contribute to a more eco-friendly campus environment. The installation of solar panels in parking lots reflects the school's commitment to renewable energy solutions.

"Receiving the Green Ribbon Award is not for the recognition; more than that, it's about raising awareness for the green movement and fostering a culture of sustainable living," Chen said. "I am extremely grateful to get to be part of this milestone."



## Best High Schools

Diamond Bar and Walnut High Schools have once again performed nationally and statewide in the 2024 U.S. News & World Report of Best High Schools released on April 23.

The premier high schools are among 17,654 nationally ranked schools and 1,652 schools ranked in California.

Diamond Bar High ranks #56 in California, #408 in the nation, #21 in Los Angeles Metro High Schools, and #149 in STEM High Schools.

Walnut High ranks #107 in California, #793 in the nation, #44 in Los Angeles Metro High Schools, and #118 in STEM High Schools.

Schools are evaluated based on their performance on state assessments and their effectiveness in preparing students for college.

"These rankings are a testament to the commitment to excellence in education and student achievement in Walnut Valley USD," said Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor.

"They truly reflect the dedication and hard work of our students, faculty, staff, and school community."

# Congratulations!

CLASS OF 2024

We're proud to spotlight eight of our stellar Class of 2024 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



**Justin Kung**  
**Yale University, 4.0 GPA**

Taken 12 AP Courses. Class of 2024 President for four years, DBHS National Honor Society President, 2023 USA Biology Olympiad Semifinalist, 2023 British Biology Olympiad Bronze Medalist, President's Volunteer Service Award, Class Top 10 for four years, AP Scholar with Distinction, Magic Castle Junior member.

*"From leading spirit rallies in a ridiculous red clown outfit and tumbling around in a giant hamster ball to planning Prom and emceeding Open House, serving as class president has given me memories I will always cherish!"*



**Jenifer Atta**  
**Stanford University, 4.0 GPA**

Taken 9 AP Courses. AP Scholar with Distinction, First Eagle Scout in Troop 65, Key Club International Vice President and Publicist/technician editor, e-Collect Club Treasurer, National Honor Society, Boy Scouts of America.

*"DBHS has provided me with a well-rounded education that goes beyond just academics. From participating in various community service projects to developing essential skills such as critical thinking and effective communication, I have acquired skills that will truly stay with me for the long haul."*



**Aayati Sangal**  
**University of Southern California, 3.96 GPA**

Taken 10 AP Courses. Miss Diamond Bar 2023, AP Scholar with Distinction. California HOSA State Finalist, DBHS Peer Counseling and Wellness Program President, DBHS HOSA Finance Chair, Neuroscience Club, SweetsnTreats small business owner.

*"I'm so grateful to have learned the art of listening as a Wellness Consultant with the Peer Counseling program. Simply being there for others as a shoulder to lean on has shown me that a little does go a long way. I'm so honored to be part of a school that recognizes this and provides such essential resources for students."*



**Lucas O'Brien**  
**University of California, Los Angeles, 3.93 GPA**

Taken 9 AP Courses. AP Scholar with Distinction, LA Phil Composer Fellowship Program, SCSBOA All-Southern Honor Ensemble, CASMEC All-State Honor Ensemble, Performing Arts Academy President, DBHS Marching Band, Wind Ensemble, Symphony Orchestra, Pit Orchestra, Jazz Combo & Jazz Band Co-Founder.

*"Debating our DBHS Jazz Combo at the Chinese New Year celebration was my favorite memory. I had always wanted to play in a jazz band growing up, and playing with my friends in our newly formed DBHS Jazz Combo made me so excited for the future of DBHS's instrumental music program!"*

## Walnut High



**Lucas He**  
**Cornell University, 4.0 GPA**

Taken 12 AP Courses. American Invitational Mathematics Examination Qualifier, U.S. National Chemistry Olympiad National Qualifier, AP Scholar with Distinction, Science Olympiad President, Science Bowl President, Math Club Founder & President, Volunteer at Suzanne Math Club.

*"Playing the role of Shakespeare's Othello in English class was the first time I had a major role that required not only public speaking but acting. I was totally out of my comfort zone and my acting was frankly embarrassing, but I learned so many valuable lessons from this experience."*



**Prema Bharath**  
**University of California, Berkeley, 3.92 GPA**

Taken 12 AP Courses and IB Diploma. AP Scholar with Distinction, President's Volunteer Service Awards, International HOSA Top 30 Finalist, National FBLA Awards, HOSA President, FBLA President, Walnut-DB AAUW Tech Trek President.

*"Over my four years, I worked to expand the HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America) Club to a wider demographic of students on our campus, growing the club from under 50 members my freshman year to over 350 members my senior year."*



**Tiara Monemi**  
**University of California, Los Angeles, 3.98 GPA**

Taken 7 AP Courses. AP Scholar, PLTW Biomedical Scholar, National Honor Society President, French Club President, Women in STEM Vice President, 2024 Class Cabinet, Mock Trial, HOSA.

*"Finally receiving my white coat after four courses of demanding work in the PLTW Biomedical Sciences program was extremely rewarding. It felt incredible to stand alongside my peers as we closed one chapter of our lives to begin the next, much longer one."*



**Baharullah Mahin**  
**Harvard College, 4.0 GPA**

Taken 8 AP Courses, IB Diploma. Questbridge National College Match Finalist, Key Club Tech Editor, Speech and Debate President, Engineering2theFuture President, Political Science Club.

*"My favorite WHS memories were the cram sessions with everyone in my IB History SL class. Before every test, we scribbled all the information we could remember on the whiteboards and then studied together!"*

## Hats off to the Class of 2024!

# Walnut Valley USD Seniors Celebrate Milestone Day



A purple and gold parade of 629 Diamond Bar High School seniors proudly celebrated their academic achievement during the May 30 graduation ceremony. Class of 2024 President Justin Kung reminded fellow graduates that they had been "in the trenches" as freshman during COVID before they turned

tassels at the fireworks finale.

"We were the first class in human history to have started high school locked inside one-inch Zoom boxes," he said.

"But, Class of 2024, we came, we saw, and together we conquered!"

The send-off was presented with traditional pomp and circumstance at the 41st commencement held at the Holmes Memorial Stadium.

Senior speakers acknowledged the talent, dedication, and passion that defined their class's journey.

"The Class of 2024 has left a lasting mark on Diamond Bar High School history," said valedictorian Joy Ahn.

"Today, we don't just celebrate individual achievements, we celebrate the bonds that united us as a class, as friends, and as a community," shared valedictorian Elyse Wong.

"Diamond Bar was wonderful and I will forever cherish the purple and gold memories we made here," she added.

Valedictorians and IB Diploma Candidates were presented with gold medallions during the ceremony.

Student Body President Clair Kim told graduates they had "broken the boundaries of what it means to be a Brahma."

"While we bid farewell to this chapter of our lives, I want to congratulate and remind you all that no matter where you go in life, that you are in charge of turning your visions into a reality," she said.

Principal David Hong paid tribute to the Class of 2024 as scholars, artists, athletes, creators, innovators, thinkers, risk-takers, and leaders.

"We recognize your accomplishments and applaud your resilience and integrity. You brought your time and talents to Diamond Bar High School and you have left behind a legacy."

Hong challenged the teens to use their voice to reveal their greatness to the world.

"Speak up and share your innovative ideas and solutions, and fight for the underdog."

The principal then welcomed senior Ethan Thomas, who has autism, on stage to reveal his greatness.

Most of Ethan's classmates had not previously heard his voice and may have seen him on campus using

(vocalizations and hand movements) to manage his emotions.

"When I feel overwhelmed or stressed I won't be able to focus and hear people when they're speaking to me," he explained.

"Stimming helps me calm down."

"I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my school and those who believed in me, advocated for me, and finally those who decided to take a chance on me to stand in front of you and give this speech!"



# Construction Update

*Tax Dollars at Work!*



## New Walnut High Gymnasium Complete

Construction was completed of the new 15,700 square-foot Walnut High School gymnasium and opened in May just in time to host year-end activities including yearbook distribution, basketball practice, and various club events.

The state-of-the-art facility features full-size basketball, badminton, and volleyball practice courts, a scoreboard, bleachers, and weight room.

The multi-use building was designed to support athletics, activities, performing arts, showcase nights, community events, and more.

The \$7.7 million project was funded by voter support of Measure WV passed in November 2018.

An official ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held in the fall.



## Honoring a Legend

# Walnut Valley USD Dedicates Ray McMullen Way

*Ray McMullen's impact is now forever imprinted in Walnut Valley Unified School District history.*



The District Education Center pathway between Lemon and Glenwick Avenues has officially been designated as "Ray McMullen Way." On March 20, District officials unveiled a new street sign and dedication plaque while paying tribute to the beloved retired administrator for over 70 years of unwavering dedication to students, staff, and schools.

"Ray, I can confidently say that our school district, our community, and thousands of people, including all of us here today, have been blessed by having you in our lives," lauded Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor.

"Thank you for all you have done and congratulations!"

In addition, Ray's late wife Nancy was recognized for designing the Walnut tree logo in 1968 that is still proudly being used today.

Friends, family, colleagues, alumni, community members, and local officials gathered to mark the special occasion.

Ray, who is now 91-years-old, has faithfully served in Walnut Valley USD since 1954.

He is a friend, colleague, exemplary leader, mentor, historian, and volunteer.

"Ray, this event today is just a small token of appreciation for all the years you have dedicated to the Walnut Valley USD and our community," shared Board of Trustees President Helen Hall.

"He has mentored teachers and administrators throughout many, many districts and continues to do so," added Personnel Commission Chairperson Michael Cobarrubias.

"Ray always puts 'Kids First' and has based all of his decisions on doing what's right for kids," praised retired

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Nancy Hogg.

"Ray models what is the very best of humankind and he has blessed Walnut Valley and all of us with his years of vision and kindness!"

Ray took to the podium and recalled when his long tenure with the District began.

"Nancy and I could have never dreamed that night more than 70 years ago when I drove out to this remote edge of Los Angeles County and met with (Superintendent) Cy Morris and three board members to be interviewed for a teaching job," he said.

"Little did we realize this would become such a central part of our lives."

Ray was first hired to teach an 8th grade class at Suzanne Middle School in the rural K-8 Walnut School District where he also drove the school bus.

As he moved into administration, Ray was selected as the school's first principal and later served simultaneously as director of classified personnel and assistant superintendent in Human Resources.

"It has been and still is a great journey and I'm humbled, so very humbled, and thankful for today," he added.

## Maple Hill Gives Back

*School pledges to support rural Kenyan library*



The world became a little smaller as educators from a rural village in Kenya visited Maple Hill Elementary on April 29. Maple Hill has pledged to support the Friends of Yimbo non-profit organization that is going to build a new library for the Muguna Primary School. The student CARE team hosted an assembly to share about the Maple Hill Gives Back Family Night held on Friday, May 17. During the assembly, the special guests from Kenya shared about their school and taught students how to say hello, goodbye, and sing a song in Swahili.

"I am so proud of our student CARE Team led by Mrs. Jodi Yim," said Principal Kim McNeil.

"This leadership group has put their hearts and souls into practicing altruism and bringing together two schools located across the world from one another. Today's assembly kicked off our fundraising efforts and we are excited to see how much we can raise to help build a library for the students at Muguna Primary School."

In total, Maple Hill's generous families donated over \$10,700 to support the building project.

During the three-week visit, the visiting Kenyan scholars, who were hosted by Friends of Yimbo and Dedicated to Learning, toured several Walnut Valley USD schools in the enriching cultural exchange program.



## A Solar Eclipse Experience

Millions donned protective eyewear before gazing skyward during a rare solar eclipse on Monday, April 8. The sun and moon danced their way across the clear Southern California sky for more than two hours.

At Walnut Elementary, while teachers talked about what was happening and students watched a live stream of the total lunar eclipse in class, Elementary Learning Specialist Jill Takayama pulled small groups outside to view "the real thing" with special viewing glasses.

At Castle Rock Elementary, students explored the different ways of viewing the magical phenomena using a colander, hands, paper dot shadow, and box cameras. "The moon was photo bombing the sun!" one youngster exclaimed during the celestial event. "It looked like the Cookie Monster took a bite out of the sun!" another child added.

About a dozen states were able to experience the rare "path of totality", in which the moon completely blocks the sun. Viewers in Southern California saw the moon take a roughly 50% bite out of the bright mass. The cosmic event was the last total solar eclipse that will be seen from the United States until 2044. Los Angeles will experience another partial solar eclipse in 2029, according to NASA.

## A Farewell Message Kelli Gile, Editor of the "Outlook" Retires



At the end of June, I'll be joining our Class of 2024 retirees and this will be my final edition of our *Outlook* community newsletter.

It has been my distinct honor to manage the message for Walnut Valley USD for the past 25 years.

I have loved writing stories, capturing special moments in photographs, videos, and celebrating our amazing students, staff, and schools.

I will forever be grateful for my career in Walnut Valley! ♥

## Retirees Wave Goodbye

Walnut Valley USD paid tribute to the outstanding Class of 2024 retirees during a May 1 ceremony. A total of 33 employees including teachers, classified personnel, and administrators were recognized with personal tributes for outstanding dedication to students and schools.

"We are proud to recognize their exceptional contributions and achievements," said Dr. Diane Perez, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources who co-hosted the event with Human Resources Director Dr. Seth Bond.

Retirees walked the red carpet during the ceremony hosted at Diamond Bar High School to receive gifts including an engraved hourglass award, sash, and certificates from local officials.

"The 2024 retirees have amassed a remarkable 978 years of service to Walnut Valley," Bond shared.

"This is an incredible class of retirees that have done so many wonderful things and are seriously irreplaceable!" lauded Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor.

"Enjoy your retirement and best wishes!"



## Staff Mini-University Returns

The annual all-staff development day, known as Mini-University, returned after a pandemic pause to Walnut High School on March 8 featuring wonderful

keynote speakers, professional growth opportunities, and Habit lunch.

"This long-standing tradition is a great day of fellowship and learning!" shared Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor.

Vans President Steve Van Doren was on hand to personally distribute custom Walnut Valley USD tennis shoes and swag items to staff members.

The popular skater shoes feature the walnut tree logo and District motto "Kids First...Every Student, Every Day."

Walnut Valley is now the only school district in the world with custom Vans shoes!



## Mindfulness Gardening

South Pointe Middle School celebrated Earth Day with a lunchtime gardening event to help

students reduce stress, practice mindfulness, increase awareness, enhance concentration, and connect with nature.

"Students had fun while learning a new coping skill," shared Counselor Natalie Gray during the April 22 event.

"I'm excited for them to take home their arrangements to grow in their gardens!"

Students choose 2-4 succulent cuttings to plant, then carefully sprinkle soil and decorative rocks on their arrangements, and finally water by submerging for a short period.

The outdoor activity cultivated awareness and presence while they tended to their plants and focused on the sensory experience of gardening.



**Outlook** WALNUT VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Issue 58 Summer 2024

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2024-2025  
SCHOOL YEAR  
BEGINS August 12

**Let's Talk!** – We want to be responsive to your needs and invite you to send questions, comments, and suggestions to [www.wvusd.org](http://www.wvusd.org).



## Kids First Getting to Know District of Choice

Parents, students, and school officials recently had the opportunity to share their experiences with the District of Choice (DOC) program.

Walnut Valley USD Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor facilitated a webinar on April 19 with five participating districts hosted by Senator Josh Newman who recently introduced Senate Bill 897.

"The way I see it, DOC is the great equalizer," said Walnut High School parent Betsy Castellanos.

"It doesn't matter where you come from - you're received with open arms."

The resolute parent researched 35 local school districts before making the pivotal decision twelve years ago.

"Education is the key in our family and we found a really great fit in Walnut Valley!" she said.

Castellanos shared that although their home district is a good one, "it wasn't right for our daughter, Pitzil (Avila-Castellanos)," who began attending Walnut Valley as a kindergartener and is now a Walnut High junior.

"We're looking at colleges now!" Castellanos said.

"And DOC made all of this possible!"

Participants also heard directly from students that have been able to attend school thanks to the program.

"The District of Choice program has opened countless doors for me," said Pitzil Avila-Castellanos, 16, who has already been contacted by Harvard, Brown, and the Claremont Colleges.

"I push myself every day to be a better student and person because I know that I have been given an incredible opportunity."

The high-achieving teen shared that being a DOC student has required diligence from her family including a 30-minute commute each way to school.

Pitzil is involved in ASB, Project Lead the Way, track, computer science, and robotics - just to name a few.

"But, in turn, Walnut Valley has guided and molded me while providing so many rich experiences."

Parent Billy Fermin has two children, a 2nd grader and

6th grader, that attend Walnut Valley schools.

"District of Choice has played a huge part in their success both academically and as well-rounded individuals," he said.

Fermin credits the DOC program for giving parents the autonomy to choose based on the right fit for their child.

"And that speaks volumes."

Fermin's son, Ethan, attends Suzanne Middle School.

"DOC allowed me to attend school with family, friends, and be surrounded by a good community with caring teachers and staff," the 12-year-old said during the webinar.

"It has challenged me to do better, I've been exposed to the IB program, and joined leadership."

"I love DOC!" Ethan said.

The public school choice program allows students to enroll in other districts that open their borders.

Senate Bill 897 aims to eliminate the sunset date and program cap that doesn't account for current student population trends.

Of Walnut Valley's 14,000 student enrollment, 2,433 are District of Choice kids this year from 33 districts in Southern California.

"I think it's important to address some of the misinformation about DOC cherry-picking students," Supt. Dr. Taylor said.

"We do not (nor are we legally allowed to) 'pick and choose'."

"In the 11 years that I've been superintendent we've taken every single kindergartener through 12th grade student that has applied for District of Choice," he said.

"The late WVUSD Superintendent Dr. Ron Hockwalt was known for his "Kids First" philosophy across the state.

"He believed all parents should have access to educational opportunities for their kids regardless of what their address might happen to be," Supt. Dr. Taylor shared.

We haven't turned down a single one of them."

"One of the biggest reasons kids come to Walnut Valley is the outcomes," Dr. Taylor said.

"We believe our kids are prepared for life."

For more information about the District of Choice program, please visit [www.wvusd.org/enroll/](http://www.wvusd.org/enroll/).