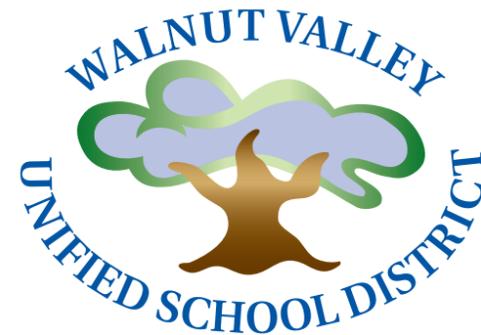


Outlook



Issue 61 WINTER 2026

Message from the

Superintendent



“The Story Wins”,

This year, we chose the motto “The Story Wins” to deepen our intentional efforts to learn about one another, our students, our families, and our colleagues. By listening and sharing our stories, we strengthen our

awareness, understanding, and empathy as a community.

One of the Five Focus Areas of my tenure as Superintendent has been Leadership Development at All Levels of the Organization. Each year, our Leadership Development Seminar provides employees with an opportunity to explore and practice the values of authentic leadership. This year, our group of 30 teachers and support staff read and discussed *Leadership Is an Art* by Max De Pree.

In one memorable chapter, “Tribal Storytellers,” De Pree reminds us of the importance of keeping our organizational stories alive, the history, the growth, and the people who make our journey meaningful. While manuals and documents can capture facts, they cannot capture heart.

We were fortunate to be joined by one of Walnut Valley’s own “tribal storytellers,” Mr. Ray McMullen, former Assistant Superintendent, Principal, and teacher, who recently celebrated his 93rd birthday. Mr. McMullen began his service to our district 70 years ago, when all of Walnut Valley’s students learned together in a one-room schoolhouse on Lemon Avenue. Today, he continues to serve as a dedicated Personnel Commissioner.

Ray led our leadership team on a bus tour of the community, sharing stories from each of our schools and reflecting on how both our district and our community have grown and thrived over the decades. It was a meaningful and inspiring experience, one that connected our past to our present, and reminded us of the shared legacy we continue to build.

De Pree concludes his chapter with a fitting reflection:

“Every company has tribal stories. Though there may be only a few tribal storytellers, it’s everyone’s job to see that things don’t replace them.”

As you read through this publication, I hope you will see the stories that define Walnut Valley, stories of our students, our schools, our employees, and our community. These are the stories that will be told by future Walnut Valley storytellers, and together, they remind us why the story truly wins.

Warm regards,
Robert P. Taylor, Ed.D.
Superintendent

District Dedicates Governance Room to Honor Helen M. Hall

The Walnut Valley Unified School District Education Center’s Board Room has been renamed in honor of Helen M. Hall, a dedicated and long-serving member of the Walnut Valley Unified School District Board of Trustees. The Helen M. Hall Governance Room now serves as a tribute to Mrs. Hall’s ongoing legacy and the significant contributions she has made to the District.

For more than 40 years, Mrs. Hall has made an indelible impact on the students, staff, and families of our school district. Her leadership, vision, and commitment to educational excellence have helped shape the direction of the District and expand opportunities for generations of learners.

Mrs. Hall’s passion for education began long before her service at Walnut Valley. She credits her mother for inspiring that drive, sharing, “My mom always told us, ‘You’re going to get an education and do better than I’ve done, because that’s your key to success.’ So if you look at why I have such a passion for education, it started at that point.”

During her tenure, Mrs. Hall has championed critical initiatives including helping pass various Bond Measures, serving as ROP Board Member, creating and establishing the District’s Diversity Think Tank, and serving as a Delegate and Regional Director for the California School Boards Association. These accomplishments reflect a legacy not only of service but of transformation.

At the May 7, 2025 Board meeting, community member Mr. William Harrison presented a suggestion to rename the Board Room in honor of Mrs. Hall’s 40 years of exceptional service and commitment to excellence in WVUSD. At the August 6, 2025 Board meeting, the Board of Trustees approved the formal request submitted by a group of community members to rename the Board Room to the Helen M. Hall Governance Room.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on September 17, bringing together WVUSD Board of Trustees, Executive Cabinet members, Personnel Commissioners, local dignitaries, and family members for the special occasion. Speakers included Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor, Board President Layla Abou-Taleb, and Helen M. Hall herself, who spoke about her journey in WVUSD and how grateful she was for the honor.

Board President Layla Abou-Taleb captured Helen’s impact during the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony sharing, “Her commitment has never wavered, her decisions have always been grounded in one simple question: what is best for our students?”

In highlighting her remarkable perseverance, Superintendent Dr. Taylor said, “There’s been lots of ups and downs and many challenges in public education and in the world both personally and professionally and she has always been resilient, always positive, always optimistic and always moving forward.”

In an interview reflecting on Mrs. Hall’s impact, retired WVUSD administrator Dr. Nancy Hogg shared, “She’s an advocate for the children who live in the margins, those who struggle with life’s challenges, those who feel alone, and those who are often not accepted in the general mainstream. Helen has always told us, the measure of Walnut Valley’s success is not the child who excels in life, but it’s how we lift those who are most at risk.”

In a follow-up interview, Mr. Harrison shared his hope that future generations remember Mrs. Hall’s commitment to education, stating, “Helen’s story is a reminder to public education that one person can not only make a difference but can make a change. Helen came from a humble background, but through dedication and commitment, she rose to who she is today - a respected and appreciated Board Member of more than 40 years. The Board Room being named after her is a tribute that will live on in perpetuity.”

Reminiscing about her time at Walnut Valley, Mrs. Hall said, “It’s been amazing to be part of a group that has been so successful and so passionate about helping others. The people truly believe in the Walnut Way, and I just love it. We can be proud of what we’re doing here and continue to do here.”

The Helen M. Hall Governance Room serves as a visible reminder to our community, and especially to our students, that dedication, integrity, and a commitment to education are values we cherish and celebrate.



Walnut Valley USD Kicks-off the 2025/2026 School Year



On August 6, Walnut Valley USD kicked off the 2025-2026 school year at the annual Welcome Back event for teachers and district staff at Walnut High School. The morning's emcees, Dr. Matt Torres, Deputy Superintendent, Business Services;

Dr. Diane Perez, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources; and Dr. Ryan Maine, Director of Student Services and Secondary Education, brought high energy and enthusiasm to the event.

Dr. Ryan Maine introduced Diamond Bar Scout Troop #777 who presented the flag, and incoming South Pointe 6th grader, Lauren Choi, performed a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem.

Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Matt Torres shared "This is one of my favorite days of the year because we get to celebrate YOU, our incredible team. Today is all about connection, recognition, and a whole lot of fun as we prepare to write another amazing chapter together."

This year's theme is "The Story Wins" - a reminder that every student and every colleague brings a story worth telling, and every interaction they have can change someone else's story for the better.

Storyteller-in-chief of Walnut Valley USD, Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor, brought the theme to life through powerful stories from across the district. Highlights included a collaborative trip with Dedicated to Learning, supporting a village in Kenya through expanded resources and meaningful professional development opportunities within the community. Dr. Taylor also included lessons from the Dodgers experienced by WVUSD employee, Jeff Jacks, the inspiring journey of Ron Hockwalt alumnus and rising artist Alistair Chavarin, and the heartwarming engagement of first-year teacher Hope Alvarez to her now husband Dylan - right in front of her first grade class.

A highlight of the event was the announcement that the Board would be considering a proposal that afternoon to dedicate the Board Room as the Helen M. Hall Governance Room, in honor of 40-year Board Member Helen M. Hall. Dr. Perez shared that the dedication would be "A lasting tribute to Helen's remarkable impact on our schools, students, and community."

The event also celebrated staff members marking milestone anniversaries with the District, from 10 to 40 years of service, and honored this year's Classified Employees and Teachers of the Year. The program featured speeches from District Teacher of the Year, Tina Moffa, a third-grade teacher at Collegewood Elementary, and Classified Employee of the Year, Teresa Burton, an Accounting Assistant II at Diamond Bar High School.

The event kicked off the year with energy and excitement for what's ahead in Walnut Valley USD!



Saluting Our Best! Walnut Valley USD Celebrates the 2024/2025 Teachers of the Year

These outstanding educators were recognized at the 28th Annual Salute to Teachers event on October 15. These honorees exemplify excellence, dedication, and a profound commitment to student success, showcasing the very best of WVUSD.

Senior Scholars Named 2025/2026 National Merit Semifinalists

Diamond Bar High



Top Row (L-R): Brian Huang, Eric Rongjia Zhang, Jesse Junxi Hu, Tyler Li, Nathan Tien, Lawrence Park, James Wang
Bottom Row (L-R): Valerie Wu, Cynthia Liu, Shelby Chang, Asia Ye, Cristina Lin, Irene Eun, Eireen Lu

Walnut High



Xinyue "Cindy" Chen & Elise Chen

Congratulations to our National Merit Semifinalists from Diamond Bar High School and Walnut High School!

Recognized by the National Merit Scholarship Program for their exceptional academic achievements, these students were selected from about 16,000 semifinalists nationwide, representing less than 1% of U.S. seniors.

Students enter the National Merit Program by taking the Preliminary SAT (PSAT)/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST). All semifinalists have the opportunity to continue in the competition for some 6,870 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$26 million to be awarded next spring. We're thrilled that our Walnut Valley students have the chance to compete for this wonderful opportunity!



Teresa Burton 2024 Classified Employee of the Year Diamond Bar High School

With 27 years of outstanding service, Teresa has been named our Classified Employee of the Year. She exemplifies professionalism, kindness, and a true "Kids First" spirit in everything she does. Known for her outstanding customer service, she brings warmth and patience to every interaction, whether guiding students through financial processes, assisting parents, or supporting community partners. Teresa's experience and steady leadership shine through in all she does. During and after the pandemic, she was instrumental in keeping school programs running smoothly, managing cancellations, refunds, and vendor negotiations with care and precision. Her proactive approach, attention to detail, and empathy allow staff to focus on what matters most - our students. Teresa's skill, dedication, and heart make her a trusted and deeply valued member of the DBHS team.

Tina Moffa 2024/2025 District Teacher of the Year Collegewood Elementary School

Tina Moffa, honored as our District Teacher of the Year, has dedicated more than 27 years to education, including 7 years in Walnut Valley. This prestigious recognition reflects her extraordinary impact on students, families, and colleagues alike. Tina is celebrated for creating a classroom where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. Beyond her classroom, Tina serves as a district trainer for Thinking Maps, mentors fellow educators, and contributes to professional development across the district. Her innovation, collaboration, and deep commitment to student growth and well-being make her a truly remarkable educator and a deserving recipient of this high honor.



Tony Award-Nominated Actor Visits Suzanne Middle School Drama Students

Suzanne Middle School's drama program had a special surprise when Tony Award-nominated actor Derek Klena stopped by. While in town for a few days, Klena reached out and asked if he could meet the students in person.

On the morning of his visit, he walked into the drama class and was met with cheers of excitement and surprise. Math and drama teacher, Mrs. Helen Papadopoulos, invited Klena to share his personal story, a fitting connection to this year's district theme, "The Story Wins." Klena spoke about the importance of listening to other people's stories and the power of sharing our own story with audiences.

"It was a great morning," said Mrs. Papadopoulos. "It's not only the theme of our district - it's also the focus of our drama class this year."



Cheers to Our Cornerstone Superstars!

Our outstanding 2024 classified staff were celebrated at the Cornerstone Awards Banquet on February 13, 2025. Their roles may differ, but their shared "Kids First" spirit shines through. We're grateful to have them on the WVUSD team.



- Amy Yee, Castle Rock Elementary School
- Danielle McGhee, Westhoff Elementary School
- Danny Lew, Chaparral Middle School
- Eric Shin, South Pointe Middle School
- Frances Baird, Vejar Elementary School
- Gina Valdespino, Maple Hill Elementary School
- Holly Albiso, C.J. Morris Elementary School
- Jeannie Lin, Walnut Elementary School
- Julie Wong, Evergreen Elementary School
- Maria Rickard, Ron Hockwalt Academies
- Michelle Harmonson, Suzanne Middle School
- Sally Kim, Quail Summit Elementary School
- Shari DeCambra, Diamond Bar High School
- So Hee Tan, Walnut High School
- Tina Moffa, Collegewood Elementary School, District Teacher of the Year
- Alyssa Gomez, Cyrus J. Morris Elementary School
- Andreas Widjaja, Transportation
- Cecille Hernandez-Ortiz, Collegewood Elementary School
- Izena Valenzuela, Nutrition Services/Collegewood
- Jean Ching Ju Wu, Educational Services
- Judy Mayekawa, Suzanne Middle School
- Melinda Snook, Chaparral Middle School
- Monica Liu, Walnut Elementary School
- Stephanie Castanon-Cardenas, Maple Hill Elementary School
- Teresa Burton, Diamond Bar High School
- Wen-Chiu Sophia Yu, Vejar Elementary School
- Yi Zhang, Vejar Elementary School

Construction Updates Big Improvements Across WVUSD!



Maple Hill



Suzanne Middle School Music/Band Building

Several exciting construction projects are underway across Walnut Valley schools, bringing new classrooms and upgrades to playgrounds and facilities to enhance learning environments.

At Collegewood Elementary, three new classrooms and a childcare room were added this year, along with two new playground shade structures.

Maple Hill Elementary has added four new classrooms, a restroom building, and a new playground area with a rubber surface, new ball wall, and tether ball play area, all completed in November. Other additions include a new 44-stall parking lot for school staff with lighting and landscaping, including one EV charging station and a new shade structure in the Kindergarten area which was completed in the summer of 2025.



Maple Hill Classroom



C.J. Morris Elementary is expanding with two new Kindergarten classrooms, a playground shade structure, and ADA-accessible parking and ramp access, anticipated for completion by January.



Suzanne Middle School Music Building

Westhoff Elementary is upgrading its outdoor walkways and student eating area with new covered canopies, expected to be completed by the end of January.

Under Measure WV Bond Projects, Walnut High School's Library Media Center modernization is currently underway and should be open for students before the end of the second semester. Suzanne Middle School will also welcome students to its brand-new Music Building in February. The new locker building that was constructed has been available for student use this year.



Walnut High School Library Modernization

The Summit 2025: Inspiring Change On & Off the Field



On August 25, the district hosted The Summit: Student Athlete Leadership Academy, bringing together more than 100 student-athletes from both Diamond Bar and Walnut High Schools.

The program centered on Unity (building trust across schools), Mentorship (leading by example), Motivation (finding deeper purpose), Integrity (doing what's right), and Teamwork (uplifting others).

The event included inspiring speeches, interactive activities, and group reflections. Remarks were shared by Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor and Deputy Superintendent, Business Services Dr. Matt Torres. They were joined by Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Diane Perez and Director of Student Services and Secondary Education Dr. Ryan Maine, who hosted the event, along with Walnut High School Athletic Director Valerie Varela, Diamond Bar High School Athletic Director Kurt Davies, and ASCIP Student Safety Advocate Heidi Cisneros.

Guest speaker Dr. Alexis Barille, Assistant Superintendent from Corona-Norco Unified School District, delivered a powerful and empowering speech to our student athletes, and shared a personal story of growth from one of her own students. She emphasized the importance of teamwork and encouraged students to show up for other teams on campus that may not typically have large crowds at their games. Dr. Barille reminded everyone that when teams support one another, it lays the foundation for a successful season.

The event was an inspiring kick-off to the school year, reminding students of the powerful impact they can make on and off the field.



Walnut Valley Schools Continue to Earn Top Rankings Among the Best in the Nation



Diamond Bar and Walnut High Schools are once again recognized among the "Best High Schools in America" in U.S. News & World Report's 2025-2026 rankings, highlighting our district's continued commitment to student success.

Both campuses offer an extensive range of AP and IB courses, providing students with rigorous, college-level opportunities. See the full report at: <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/national-rankings>.

Walnut Valley USD has also earned an A+ grade and top 1% ranking out of 10,394 School Districts in America in Niche's 2026 Report.

The 2026 Best School Districts ranking is based on data from the U.S. Department of Education, along with millions of reviews from students and parents. Factors considered include state test scores, college readiness, graduation rates, public school district ratings, and more. Read the full report card at: <https://www.niche.com/k12/d/walnut-valley-unified-school-district-ca/>.

Carrying the Branding Iron Game Legacy Forward

On Friday, October 3, Walnut and Diamond Bar High Schools faced off during the Branding Iron Game, a cherished tradition in the Walnut Valley community dating back to 1986. Both teams and their enthusiastic fans filled the Walt Holmes Memorial Stadium at Diamond Bar High School.

Walnut High School Director of Athletics, Valerie Varela, shared how the game represents more than football, saying, "It's about school pride, community support, and honoring a long-standing tradition between two great schools. It brings everyone together from students, alumni, and families to district staff who are proud to celebrate our programs."

Both teams showed great effort and determination throughout the game. The crowd, Pep Squad, and bands from both sides brought incredible energy until the very end. At halftime, Diamond Bar's Thundering Herd took the field, delivering a performance that highlighted the school's musical talent.

Diamond Bar High School's Director of Athletics, Kurt Davies, believes the Branding Iron Game is what makes high school athletics so special, saying, "Every single person on this campus is part of this special night. The team could not do it without the Thundering Herd, The Pep Squad, The Bull Pen and every single person in the stadium cheering their hearts out. The victory is a great jump start to what we hope is another great year for Brahma Athletics."

Whether they win or lose, the Branding Iron Game reminds student athletes that they're part of something bigger. Varela said, "Games like this are learning experiences that help us grow as a team and refocus on what it takes to perform at our best. We'll use this as motivation to come back stronger next season and defend our home field."

Congratulations to the Brahmans for bringing home the Branding Iron and defeating the Mustangs 30-7!



Three WVUSD Employees Reach 40 Years of Service

Three Walnut Valley USD employees recently received a special recognition for 40 years of dedicated service in our District.

Honorees include C.J. Morris Elementary School Custodian II Pete Rodriguez, Suzanne Middle School Math and Drama Teacher Helen Papadopoulos, and Walnut High School Campus Security Officer Keith Dillabough.

Their passion and dedication have made a lasting impact on countless students. We are deeply grateful for all they have contributed to the Walnut Valley community over the past 40 years.



Helen Papadopoulos

Suzanne Middle School Math and Drama Teacher



Keith Dillabough

Walnut High School Campus Security Officer



Pete Rodriguez

C.J. Morris Elementary School Custodian II



Issue 61 Winter 2026

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Spring Break: **Apr. 3 - 10, 2026**

Last Day of School: **May 28, 2026**

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 School in WVUSD

On August 11, over 14,300 students across 15 WVUSD schools returned to school. Each school celebrated the first day with warm welcomes and festive drop-off celebrations to greet their students.

At Evergreen Elementary, teachers and staff lined the halls waving pom-poms to welcome students back to campus. Returning students held up encouraging signs for new Eagles, and everyone enjoyed the upbeat music that filled the school.

Superintendent Dr. Taylor visited several school sites including Collegewood Elementary and Walnut High School to welcome families and students back to campus. During his visits, he stopped by classrooms, connected with staff, and wrapped up the day at Diamond Bar High School's high-energy First Day Pep Rally.

The excitement was contagious as the District kicked off another amazing school year in Walnut Valley!



Literacy Comes to Life at Quail Summit

On October 3, Mr. Miller's first grade class hosted a Family Literacy Day at Quail Summit Elementary School. Students and their families were invited into the classroom to enjoy a shared reading experience. The goal was to build upon what families are already doing every day: engaging in literacy.

Reflecting on his favorite memory from the day, Mr. Miller said it was "incredibly special to watch my students greet and embrace their families as they came into our room. It was remarkable that every student had at least one caregiver attend our event."

Mr. Miller modeled a reading strategy for the class to practice. Each child selected a book of their choice, and instead of simply reading the words, students engaged more deeply by asking thought-provoking questions such as, "What do you see?", "What do you notice?" and "What do you wonder?" This meaningful activity allowed families to elevate the analytical skills the students are developing through real-world practice.

Mr. Miller spoke about the importance of developing and strengthening a deep connection between home and school saying, "We hope families come to see that literacy goes beyond alphabetic reading. Literacy is observing, talking, inferring, and interpreting situations or environments. These are all literacy skills that will serve our students well beyond the classroom walls."

Afterwards, students and their families enjoyed refreshments and treats while proudly showing their loved ones the classroom where they learn each day.



Mustang Making a Difference

Ty Thompson, a proud Mustang from Walnut High School, was appointed to the Youth Advisory Council (YAC), partnering with California State Superintendent Tony Thurmond, and the Department of Education to provide student insight on education policy.

The Superintendent's Youth Advisory Council aims to give students a voice and ensure underrepresented youth are heard at the state level. By engaging with students authentically, YAC works to reduce achievement gaps, promote equity, and create positive, lasting change for California students.

Each youth advisory council member presented their own proposal and Ty's was selected to be pushed towards legislature. His proposal focused on empowering students to take a more active role in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and throughout the goal-setting process. We are incredibly proud of Ty and the meaningful impact his proposal will make on many students!

