



PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

Dear Families,

As the 2024–2025 school year comes to a close, I enjoy reflecting on the many milestones, memories, and moments we've shared together at La Jolla Elementary School.

From the first day of school to the final bell, our students have shown resilience, creativity, and kindness. We are so proud of all they've accomplished—whether it was learning to read their first book, tackling a tough math concept, performing on stage, or showing leadership in and out of the classroom.

My heartfelt thanks go out to our dedicated teachers, staff, and families. Your partnership and support have made this year a huge success. It allowed us to create and foster a nurturing environment where every student could thrive.

As we head into the summer, I wish our promoting 5th graders all the best in their next adventure. You will always be part of the La Jolla Elementary family, and may the world be your oyster!

I wish everyone a relaxing and joyful summer. I look forward to welcoming everyone back in the fall for another exciting year of learning, discovery, friendships, and relationships.

Warmly,

 *Stephanie Hasselbrink*, Ed.D

Stephanie Hasselbrink,
Principal

PTO PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

As the 2024–25 school year comes to a close, we want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible community we're so fortunate to be a part of. We are beyond proud of the dedicated volunteers who poured countless hours into creating meaningful and memorable events—from the Back to School Social and Wellness Night to Family Movie Night, the Talent Show, Family Dance, and the International Festival.

Behind the scenes, an extraordinary group of volunteers kept everything running smoothly all year long. From our room parents, logowear team, hospitality chairs, health and safety leads, and lost and found coordinators, to our amazing communications chairs—the list is truly endless. Your dedication, creativity, and generosity made

this school year what it was, and we are so grateful for each and every one of you.

We'd also like to give a very special thank you to Georgina Gaerin and Cheryl Carino, whose youngest children are moving on to middle school. Georgina, as VP of Programs, was instrumental in shaping our after-school enrichment offerings and also co-chaired an incredible Book Fair. Cheryl joined the PTO to make sure our 5th graders had the most memorable yearbook to date—and she truly delivered.

Thank you all for the heart you bring to this community. We wish everyone a summer filled with joy, excitement, and well-deserved fun and relaxation. We look forward to welcoming everyone back in August and kicking off another great year for our school!

With gratitude,

Dana Hourani & Sarah Topol
PTO Co-Presidents

GOODBYE LA JOLLA ELEMENTARY

This year I've had so much fun being your Student Council President. As promised in my election campaign, we managed to get more bouncy balls for recess. When the L.A. fires happened, we came in with a bake sale and raised over \$500. And we had a clothes drive working with La Jolla High School for the L.A. fire victims. We also accomplished a successful Christmas charity toy drive. Recently, we had an amazing Sun Safety Program to help La Jolla Elementary realize the importance of sun safety. Finally, some tips for school are, always be kind, have fun, and try your hardest. If you do these, you will succeed!
-Chloe Kingston



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Hope of America Award

On April 11th, four LJES students were honored by the Kiwanis Club of La Jolla with the Hope of America Award. Hope of America is a program to identify and honor outstanding fifth grade students from Bird Rock, La Jolla, and Torrey Pines Elementary schools. Principals at each school identify award recipients who have been recognized by their teachers and peers for demonstrating exceptional leadership, moral character, ethical conduct, and outstanding academic accomplishment. Congratulations to this year's LJES award recipients: Kate Wilkinson, Siena Jones, Maeve Gilliam, and Andrew Nelson!



FLL Robotics Spring Showdown

In May, our four La Jolla Cluster Teams, made up of students from LJES and Muirlands, competed in their final competition of the 24-25 season, Spring Showdown. Teams competed in real-world engineering challenges by building LEGO-based robots to complete themed missions. The competition emphasizes hands-on learning, innovation, and collaboration, empowering students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. Spring Showdown is extra special because engineers are given an on-the-spot challenge where they are partnered with teams from around San Diego to complete the new challenge within one hour. Our engineers showed their knowledge, learned from others, and made new friends.



All four teams proudly accepted their medals, and two of our teams, Submerged Circuits and Beach Bots, were finalists in one of the most prestigious awards in FLL (First Lego League), the Core Values Trophy. This award recognizes teams that best demonstrate the essential principles of FLL: discovery, innovation, impact, inclusion, teamwork, and fun. Winning this award is a testament to the team's character, collaboration, and sportsmanship, making it one of the highest honors in the competition.

Scholastic Storyworks Winner

LJES is thrilled to share that Nidhi Rajesh Menon has been selected as a winner of the Scholastic Storyworks 3 Contest. The contest invited students nationwide to delve into the dramatic events of the 1964 Great Alaska Earthquake and express their understanding through creative writing. Of the hundreds of contest submissions received by Scholastic, the winners were selected based on their strong critical thinking, point of view, and reading and writing skills. To see her writing efforts being recognized at such a young age is truly inspiring. We are excited for this milestone in her journey as a writer, and can't wait to see what she will achieve next!



JUNIOR OLYMPICS 2025

La Jolla Elementary had another fantastic showing at this year's Kiwanis Club Junior Olympics! LJES students Gabby Benedek, Priya Pandya, and Mila Wills helped kick off the Junior Olympics by singing in the National Anthem Choir. Then LJES students graced the winners' podium more times than we could count! During the much-anticipated relay races, our Boys Relay Team took 3rd, and Chloe Gaerin and Zane Dailey showcased their speed by each taking 2nd in the Fastest Girl in La Jolla and Fastest Boy in La Jolla 400m race, respectively.





DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY

No surprise here, but the annual Family Dance was a hit and the perfect way to head into Spring Break. There was music, dancing, tons of fun, and even Cosmic Cotton Candy! Families connected, bonded, and cut loose on the dance floor, making memories that will last well beyond the night. Thank you to the Family Dance Chairs, Linda Gastaldello and Nassim Wills, for an amazing, energy-filled evening.



LIBRARY HAPPENINGS

Author/Illustrator Kim Dwinell Visit

La Jolla Elementary had a fun visit from author and illustrator Kim Dwinell! She spoke to our 3rd and 5th grade students about her journey as a storyteller—from working as an animator at Disney to creating her own graphic novel series, *Surfside Girls*. Kim shared her love of surfing and life guarding in Southern California, a pastime that inspires the beachy, adventurous spirit of her books.

One of the highlights of the visit was a live drawing demonstration, where Kim sketched her characters right in front of the students and explained her creative process. It was amazing to see her artwork come to life! The visit was full of energy and inspiration, as Kim encouraged students to explore their own creativity and tell the stories that matter to them. After the presentation, she took time to sign books and chat with students, making it a special day for everyone. All the *Surfside Girls* books are available to check out from our school library, or for purchase at Warwick's.

EcoVivarium

LJES welcomed a special visit from EcoVivarium, a local nonprofit that specializes in reptile education and rescue. They brought a selection of reptiles to share with our UTK and 2nd grade students, giving them an unforgettable up-close look. The hands-on experience allowed students to observe and learn about snakes, lizards, and tortoises in a safe, interactive setting, sparking curiosity and excitement.

During the visit, EcoVivarium educators shared fun facts and important lessons about reptile habitats, diets, and behaviors, while encouraging students to ask questions and engage with the animals. For many children, it was their first time seeing a snake so close or feeling the textured shell of a tortoise. This enrichment workshop was generously funded by the Friends of La Jolla Elementary Foundation.



AMERICAN REVOLUTION COMES TO LIFE

Ms. Skommesa, Mrs. Balmat, and Ms. Pollen's classes stepped back in time to teach students and families alike in *The American Revolution* musical. These students kept their audience laughing and learning about this important chapter in America's history.



INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

The International Festival made its highly anticipated return on April 25th. There were 25 country booths across all continents (minus Antarctica) and approximately 750 attendees! Our amazing country representatives shared the rich culture and food of the many families at La Jolla Elementary School. This event is beloved and is a beautiful display of the diverse tapestry of our school. Students and families got an opportunity to collect passport stamps from each country, taste delicious bites from across the world, play games and win prizes, while listening to international beats and learning about the world. We are so grateful to all the people who made this event happen, from all of our country booth representatives, volunteers, and vendors (House of Bao, Namino Persian Grill, Gelu, KrispyBoyz, San Diego Lemonade, Voice of San Diego DJ, and Sydney the Balloon Lady). And of course a big thanks to the committee Andrea Russell, Kim Custard, Stacey Gubernator, Lea Tervit, and Cher Jabbari.



GOLD FEVER!

La Jolla Elementary looked a lot like 1849 for a day as the 4th graders concluded their study of the Gold Rush with 49er Day. The 4th graders dressed the part and tried to strike it rich during this annual Gold Rush themed school-wide event.



FRIENDS PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

Dear LJES Families,

It has been such a joy and privilege to serve as co-presidents of Friends of La Jolla Elementary School Foundation again this year! We feel incredibly lucky to be a part of the wonderful community of teachers, staff and volunteers that go above and beyond for each one of our children here at LJES. We want to thank the parents at our school for their continued support and generous contributions to Friends this year.

The mission of our foundation is to enhance and enrich the education of each and every child at La Jolla Elementary. Thanks to your donations, we were able to fund a record number of teachers this year, reducing our student-teacher ratios and avoiding combination classes. Our investment in our teachers directly benefit our children's class experience and ensures more individualized attention for each child.

Your donations to Friends and support of the Open Aire Market has made this all possible! We will continue to rely on your generosity and support to continue providing vital teachers and enrichment opportunities to our children's education. Thank you to each and every family's commitment to the success of La Jolla Elementary School!

On a personal note, I will be rolling off the executive board of the foundation. It has been a privilege to serve as vice president, gala chair, market operations chair and co-President of Friends. I have enjoyed working closely with teachers, staff and parents that have fostered this wonderful community for our children. I urge parents to volunteer in any way that they can, your talents and passion are needed to continue providing the amazing opportunities for our children funded by Friends.

Thank you so much to Ulka Pandya, Carolina Tiller and Mala Mathur for all of your contributions and hard work on Friends. We are grateful for your everlasting impact on our community and we will miss you on the foundation. Thank you Elizabeth Van Clief for being an amazing innovative partner and friend to work with on Friends and on the Muirlands Foundation. The future of the foundation is bright with you and Anne Dulgeroff leading it next year!

Sincerely,
Sonal Patel



THE SWEET SOUNDS OF SPRING

If you happened to have been walking by the auditorium towards the end of April, you may have been treated to some delightful harmonies. The 2nd graders sang and danced their hearts out during the adorable annual Spring Sing!



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Nina Bartolome seemed quite comfortable as Principal for a Day with her VP, Sydney Abdollahian.

TO WELCOME AND EMBRACE: THE LEGACY OF MRS. ASPASIA NICOLAIDIS



Her name, Aspasia, means “to welcome” and “to embrace”—and that’s exactly how she moved through this world. With open arms and a heart full of grace, Mrs. Nicolaidis welcomed every student as her own and embraced every family with compassion. She gave so much of herself—her time, her love, her energy—never asking for anything in return. Her classroom was a safe haven where children felt seen, heard, and deeply cared for. She taught with kindness, led with joy, and loved without limits. Her presence brought light. Her absence is felt deeply. But her legacy—of love, of care, of wholehearted giving—lives on in every life she touched, in every child she believed in, and in the community she helped shape with her extraordinary heart.





Forever a part of our story.



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