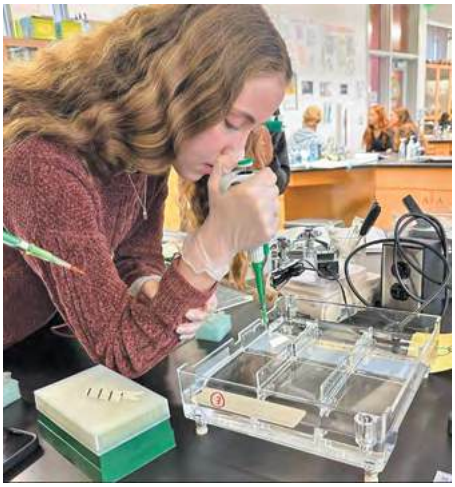
School News

Education + Communication = A Better Nation

Covering the Manhattan Beach Unified School District

Volume 3, Issue 4 **May 2025**



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south bay leadership & wellness conference

Saturday, May 31, 2025
9:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.

allcove Beach Cities
514 N. Prospect Ave., 4th floor
Redondo Beach, CA 90277

Join young leaders from more than 30 organizations across the South Bay to connect, collaborate and uplift our voices together at our annual South Bay Leadership & Wellness Conference. This event will include conversations about advocacy, mental health, wellness and important topics facing our generation today.

For young people ages 12-25. Free food and prizes are included!
Plus, get community service hours.
Please RSVP by Sunday May 18, 2025.

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There is a lot to celebrate in MBUSD for the 2024-25 school year. Our District continues to shine, with our schools ranked among the top five in Language Arts and the top seven in Mathematics out of all K-12 unified school districts in California. Additionally, the California Department of Education (CDE) recently announced the 336 schools statewide honored as 2025 California Distinguished Schools — and Pacific Elementary School is proudly among them! This recognition highlights both academic excellence and a commitment to fostering a positive school climate. Impressively, every MBUSD school has previously earned the California Distinguished School honor.

Mira Costa High School also had exciting news, following its mid-cycle visit from the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC), the school successfully met all criteria to retain full accreditation. The visit, combined with the school's detailed progress report, reaffirmed Mira Costa's accreditation through the end of the current cycle in 2028.

Thanks to funding from Proposition 28, which supports the expansion of visual and performing arts programs across California public schools, our students experienced even more creative opportunities this year. Highlights include weekly Drama and Musical Theatre lessons for all TK and Kindergarten classes, where students engage in dramatic play, improvisation, storytelling, singing, and movement with a credentialed teacher. Meanwhile, 1st and 2nd graders now enjoy a redesigned, year-long music program that more than doubles their previous musical arts instruction time. At MBMS and Mira Costa, Prop 28 funds are helping expand course offerings in Art, Drama, and Music, giving all students greater access to arts education. At Mira Costa, even students without prior musical training can now join our GRAMMY® Award-winning instrumental music program.

We are also thrilled to share that, for the fourth consecutive year, a Mira Costa student has been named an Edison International Scholar, receiving a $50,000 scholarship to pursue a college education in STEM.

Finally, we celebrate all of our Teacher of the Year and Classified Employee of the Year honorees! A special congratulations to District Teacher of the Year, Mira Costa English teacher Maddie Hutchinson, and District Classified Employee of the Year, Nelson Maheia, our IT Help Desk Assistant, for their dedication and commitment to MBUSD.

Senior Maia Rocha Receives $50,000 Edison International Scholarship!

Congratulations to our 2025 Teachers of the Year Honorees!

MBUSD

Susan Holton
Support Teacher - Science
Grand View
Elementary

Heather Tuttle
Special Education
Meadows
Elementary

Jackie Murphy
Kindergarten
Pacific
Elementary

Liana Kuklinski
3rd Grade
Pennekamp
Elementary

Megan Montz
2nd Grade
Robinson Elementary

Nataly Garcia
Preschool
MB Preschool

Sue Steinmetz
P.E.
Manhattan Beach
Middle School

Maddie Hutchinson
English and Link Crew
Mira Costa
High School

Congratulations to our Classified Employees of the Year!

Nelson Maheia
IT Help Desk
District Office

Isabel Gonzalez
Cook
Food &
Nutrition Services

Victor Villa
Maintenance Work
Maintenance &
Operations

Michelle Reens
Office Specialist
Meadows

Angela Olmos
Office Specialist
Pacific

Lindsay Marco
OT
MB Preschool

Markus Heuer
IA-IBI
Grand View

Jared Gordon
IA-IBI
Robinson

John Ruta
Day Custodian
Pennekamp

Sasha Vazquez
Office Specialist
MBMS

Emily Mares
IA-SE
Mira Costa

Stadium Way Project Completed

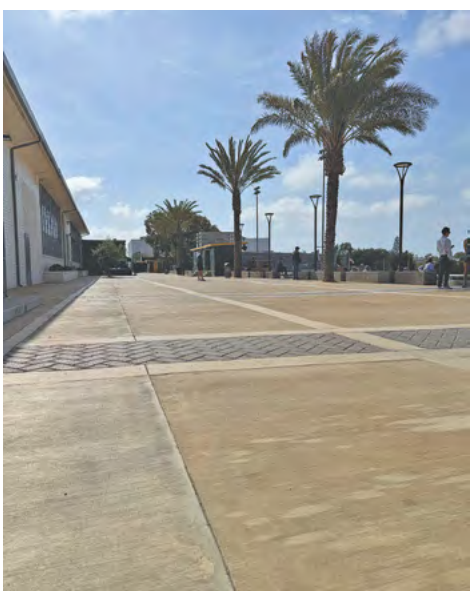
Dr. Dawnalyn Murakawa-Leopard
Deputy Superintendent

We are thrilled to announce the successful completion of the Stadium Way project at Mira Costa High School! This school year, our staff, students, and visitors have been able to enjoy the beautiful upgrades to the main entry to Waller Stadium and the Athletic Complex off Peck Avenue. The area has been transformed into a modern, functional, and welcoming space for all.

The new gateway not only makes it easier for newcomers and visitors to locate the Stadium and Athletic Complex, but it also creates a smoother and more inviting entry experience for campus events.

Stadium Way now features a range of enhancements designed to improve both accessibility and aesthetics. Highlights include clear signage and improved wayfinding, new lighting, and a spacious plaza area south of the stadium stands. The renovated pathway has been restructured to accommodate wheelchair users, with dedicated seating areas thoughtfully integrated into the design.

Additional upgrades include new benches for added comfort, permeable pavers that promote rainwater capture and improved stormwater drainage, and a redesigned trash area to support better waste sorting and management. A new merchandise stand, ticket booth, and refreshed paint and branding—including the iconic Mira Costa logo etched into the concrete in front of the press box—complete the transformation. This marks the final project funded by Measure C. Go Mustangs!



E-Bike Safety Program Launches

Dr. Kerry Riccio Aguero
Director
Student Services

This school year, we successfully launched the MBUSD E-Bike Safety Program across all campuses for students in 4th grade and above. In an effort to promote greater awareness and ensure safety on the roads and our campuses, the program requires students who ride an e-bike to school to provide proof of certification from an approved e-bike safety course.

We are proud to have sponsored in-person E-Bike Sense classes and to have offered our families a discount for the online course through PedalAce. Upon completing one of these courses, students receive an MBUSD-registered sticker, allowing them to park their e-bikes on campus.

The in-person training teaches students important e-bike safety protocols, road rules, and defensive riding skills. It empowers them to ride responsibly and confidently, helping to protect both themselves and others. Students also learn how to properly fit their helmets, perform essential bike checks for air, brakes, and chains, and participate in safety drills tailored specifically to e-bikes.

Additionally, we recently participated in Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi's E-Bike Expo event, further supporting our commitment to e-bike safety education.

PENINSULA SPORTS CAMPS

Summer 2025

Camp features include:
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52nd Annual Peninsula Basketball Camp
July 14-18, July 21-25 - *Boys & Girls age 5-14*

48th Annual Peninsula Baseball Camp
July 21-25 - *Boys & Girls age 5-12*

48th Annual Peninsula Soccer Camp
July 14-18, July 21-25 - *Boys & Girls age 5-14*

Fees: Full Day $325 • Half Day $180
Time: 9:00am–4:00pm or 9:00am–12:00pm • Monday–Friday
Location: Palos Verdes High School
600 Cloydon Rd., Palos Verdes Estates

28th Annual Half Day Peninsula Soccer Camp
June 9-13, August 4-8
Boys & Girls age 5-12

21st Annual Half Day Peninsula Baseball Camp
July 28-August 1
Boys & Girls age 5-10

Fees: $170 **Time:** 9:00am–12:00pm, Monday–Friday
Location: Hesse Park, Rancho Palos Verdes

Call for More Info! Tom Maier (310) 213-5433
Sign Up Online: www.PeninsulaSportsCamps.com

The Peninsula Sports Camps, Inc. are not related to, sponsored by, or endorsed by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District.

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Manhattan Beach Education Foundation

mbef.org

Hilary Mahan
Executive Director

For over four decades, the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation (MBEF) has played a vital role in shaping the exceptional educational experiences in Manhattan Beach public schools. Founded in 1983, MBEF was created to address a funding shortfall and to give families a way to invest directly in their local schools. Since then, MBEF has contributed more than $100 million to build a strong foundation in language arts and math, hands-on opportunities in science, art, and music, personalized instruction, and opportunities for students to collaborate and connect with their peers.

As a community-driven nonprofit, MBEF bridges the gap between limited state funding and the high expectations our community holds for its public schools. Each year, MBEF's fundraising supports approximately 10% of the District's annual budget, funding essential educator positions and enrichment programs for students from transitional kindergarten through 12th grade that align with parent, teacher, and district priorities.

Current grant priorities reflect a shared commitment to maintaining reasonable class sizes, rigorous academics, and a well-rounded curriculum that includes:

- Class Size Reduction — Grades 4-12
- Counselors Specializing in Academic and Social Emotional Support, Grades 6-12
- Counselors Specializing in College and Career Pathways, Grades 9-12
- Library Resource Specialists, Grades TK-8
- MakerSpace Specialists, Grades TK-5
- Music Instructors, Grades K-12
- Physical Education Instructors, Grades 1-5
- Science Lab Instructors, TK-5
- STEAM Pathway Electives, Grades 6-12
- VAPA Pathway Electives, Grades 6-12

The impact of MBEF is evident every day—in smaller class sizes, individualized support, enriched curriculum, and innovative learning environments that cultivate curiosity, creativity, and collaboration. These are the hallmarks of a 21st-century education, and thanks to the unwavering support of our community, MBEF remains steadfast in its mission to elevate public education in Manhattan Beach.

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camp.integem.com
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Age Groups: 5-8, 8-10, 10-14, 14+
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PTA Council

www.mbusd.org/PTA

Jennifer Gale
President

Andrea Barker
Executive Vice President

Partnering for Success

Did you know that there are 3,656 PTA members in our seven Manhattan Beach PTAs?

MB Council of PTAs thanks everyone who joined the PTA this year; without the financial contributions and volunteers, our programs and projects would not be possible. The Parent Teacher Association is the oldest and largest child advocacy association in America. It provides parents with guidance, resources, and expertise and helps them navigate their school experience. The PTA also provides timely information about national and state legislation affecting our schools and children. Here in Manhattan Beach, the amazing, ongoing partnership of the PTA and MBUSD continues. We are extremely grateful to our volunteers for their time, energy, and passion for our schools.

This year, PTA volunteered 75,000 hours on behalf of our schools. Our PTA provides school supplies and technology; capital improvements; academic, social-emotional, and VAPA programming; teacher appreciation and professional development opportunities; community support; and cultural and school-wide celebrations. Various PTA parent functions provide a forum for parents to voice their opinions, engage in discussions, and learn about what is happening at our schools. PTAs produce weekly newsletters and social media posts, informing the community of the latest school news and events. PTA is a constant voice for our children and strives to make our schools a better place to learn and grow!

School News Roll Call
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A+ Medical Miller Minute

Inderpal Randhawa, M.D.,
medical director,
Children's Pulmonary Institute,
Miller Children's & Women's Hospital

Asthma Awareness Month: Creating an Asthma Action Plan for Kids at School

Asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions among children and managing it at school requires preparation. Triggers like allergens and physical activity can lead to flare-ups, but a well-structured asthma action plan helps keep symptoms under control.

An asthma action plan helps control symptoms by outlining a child's triggers, medications, and emergency steps if symptoms worsen. It ensures that school staff are prepared to act when necessary, keeping your child safe.

Steps to Implementing an Asthma Action Plan at School:

1. **Consult Your Child's Care Team**: Consult your child's pulmonologist and pediatrician to develop a personalized asthma action plan that includes triggers, medication, and emergency response details.
2. **Communicate with the School**: Provide the school nurse and teachers with a copy of the plan. Meet to review your child's needs.
3. **Ensure Medication Access**: Ensure your child's quick-relief inhaler and necessary medications are easily accessible at school. Complete any required paperwork for medication authorization.
4. **Minimize Triggers**: Work with the school to identify and minimize asthma triggers like dust, mold, or pollen.
5. **Teach Self-Management Skills**: Help your child recognize symptoms, use their inhaler, or seek help.

For families in Los Angeles, the South Bay, and Long Beach, Miller Children's & Women's Hospital offers valuable asthma resources. The Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma (LBACA), part of Miller Children's & Women's Hospital, provides education, community programs, and tools like the Fight Asthma Tracker to help families manage symptoms. LBACA also partners with SmartAirLA, offering real-time air quality monitoring and alerts to help families reduce exposure to harmful air pollutants.

By implementing an asthma action plan and using resources like LBACA, parents and schools can work together to keep children safe and healthy throughout the school year.

Scan here to explore more resources offered through the Children's Pulmonary Institute.

Pablo, Age 6

At 11 months, Pablo was fighting for his life.

Today, he's got six candles on his cake.

Failing organs. Eight months in a coma. Fighting for every breath. At 11 months old, this is what Leukemia brought Pablo. The one bright spot, he was at MemorialCare Miller Children's & Women's Hospital where a team of top doctors, nurses, and specialists helped save his life. For over a year in the PICU, our highly-trained staff never stopped caring for Pablo and his family. Caring is our calling.

Learn more at millerchildrens.org/care

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FROM THE SOUTH BAY TO ORANGE COUNTY

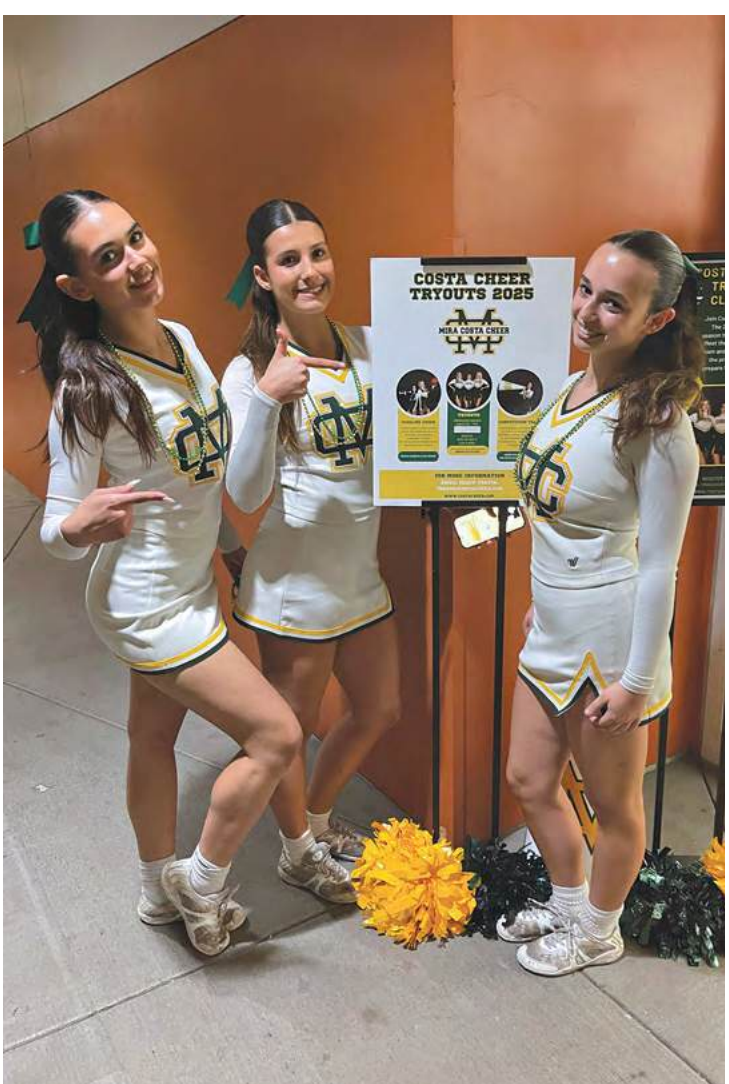
MBX Foundation

www.MBXfoundation.org

Heather Interien
Executive Director

MBX is proud to support academic, educational, musical, athletic, and co-curricular programs established for and in support of the Manhattan Beach Unified School District and the children that make it thrive. The breadth of support is wide and spans from the installation of the West Field, campus improvements, a fully accredited summer school, after-school programs hosted at all five elementary schools and the middle school, ten plus summer camps, and the oversight operations of over forty-five Mira Costa High School Booster Clubs.

This past year MBX continued to train and support over forty Mira Costa Booster Clubs and facilitate our "This Is Costa Part 2" event in March. Families had the opportunity to attend up to three informational break-out sessions to learn about the MBX Foundation Summer School classes, academic clubs, athletics, music, and art programs. Each sports team and arts program had a classroom to answer in-depth questions and allow families to hear from current students, coaches, and advisors. Over 1,200 people attended, and the next "This is Costa" night will be hosted by MBX in Fall 2026. We are proud to have continued our MBX Foundation Grants Program this year. Over twenty grants have been awarded to Manhattan Beach elementary schools, the Manhattan Beach Middle School, Mira Costa High School and many Mira Costa High School Booster Clubs. MBX looks forward to continuing the support of children, coaches, administration, teachers, and advisors within our community.



Emory Chen, MSW, MA Ed
Director
Youth Services

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

During the month of May, events beginning with the letter "M" come to mind, like Mother's Day and Memorial Day.

While it's important to celebrate Moms for all they do, and welcome the unofficial start of summer, there's another "M" event this month that also deserves our attention: Mental Health Awareness Month.

Many organizations participate in Mental Health Awareness Month, including Mental Health America, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), the lead federal agency for research on mental disorders.

Having good mental health can help you cope with stress and improve your quality of life, and these groups are focused on making people aware of their mental health and the important services and resources available today.

One group promoting mental health locally is allcove Beach Cities, which in just over two years has enrolled more than 1,360 young people in a service stream, ranging from mental health to physical health, substance use, peer or family support, to education and employment support.

After celebrating its second anniversary last November, allcove Beach Cities reviewed its attendance data and determined it could better serve young people ages 12-25 by changing its hours. The center is now open Monday through Friday from 1 – 7 p.m. and is closed on weekends, except for special events.

One such special event coming to allcove is the South Bay Leadership & Wellness Conference on Saturday, May 31. The free conference, for young people ages 12-25, will feature conversations about advocacy, mental health, wellness and other important topics facing young people today. Local and state leaders will participate to learn more about what young people are prioritizing and what concerns them as they look to the future. Go to https://allcove.org/centers/beach-cities/ to learn more and to register.

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Dr. Jennifer Huynh
Principal

2025 Mira Costa Scholar Quiz

The Mira Costa High School 2025 Scholar Quiz Tournament wrapped up successfully for another year! The MCHS Green Team led their team to victory answering 52 questions and winning 225-190. The Scholar Quiz started with 64 teams of four and the competition narrowed down to the final two after intense matches. The top four teams battled it out in the semi-finals leading to an exciting championship match.

A big thank you to Study Hut for providing the challenging questions and for donating t-shirts to all teams that won their first-round match, adding extra excitement to the event. Mira Costa PTSA played a crucial role as a sponsor and organizer, coordinating over 120 volunteers who served as readers, flag judges, and scorekeepers. Throughout the tournament, classrooms were filled with the energy and enthusiasm of the participants.

Congratulations to all the teams for making this year's Scholar Quiz Tournament a memorable and spirited competition!

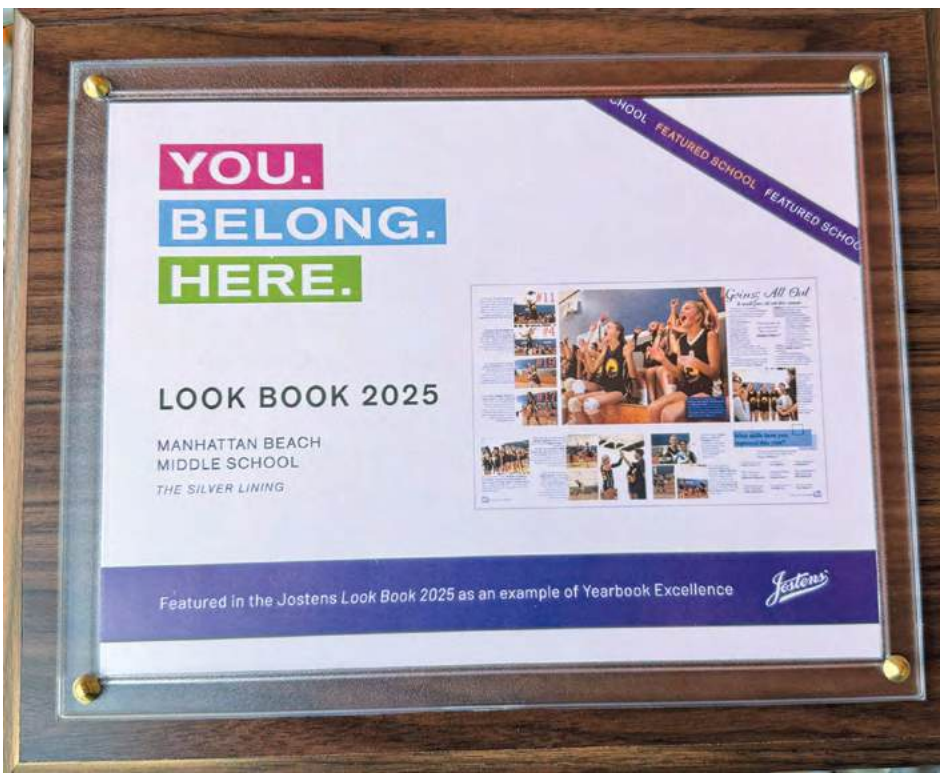
1501 N. Redondo Ave., Manhattan Beach, CA 90266 • 310/545-4878 • www.mbmswaves.com

Luke Olesiuk
Principal

The Tidal Wave Earns National Recognition

Congratulations to the Manhattan Beach Middle School Yearbook students and staff for earning the National Yearbook Program of Excellence Award from Jostens, the leading producer of yearbooks and student-created content. This honor recognizes engaging yearbooks that reflect a broad representation of the student body while helping students to develop 21st century skills such as communication, collaboration, and information and communication technologies (ICT) literacy. MBMS yearbook staff and students received the accolade for their 2024 yearbook, Silver Lining. Jostens awarded this honor to only the top 40% of Josten yearbooks nationwide, including those from high schools and colleges.

The MBMS award-winning yearbook, The Tidal Wave is led by Sydney Weitz and Eve-Anna Chabert Graeff, co-editors in chief, under the direction of Mr. David Levy, MBMS yearbook adviser. The award was presented to the MBMS yearbook program for achieving defined criteria in between one and three of the following categories: creating an inclusive yearbook, generating school engagement, and successfully managing the yearbook creation process.

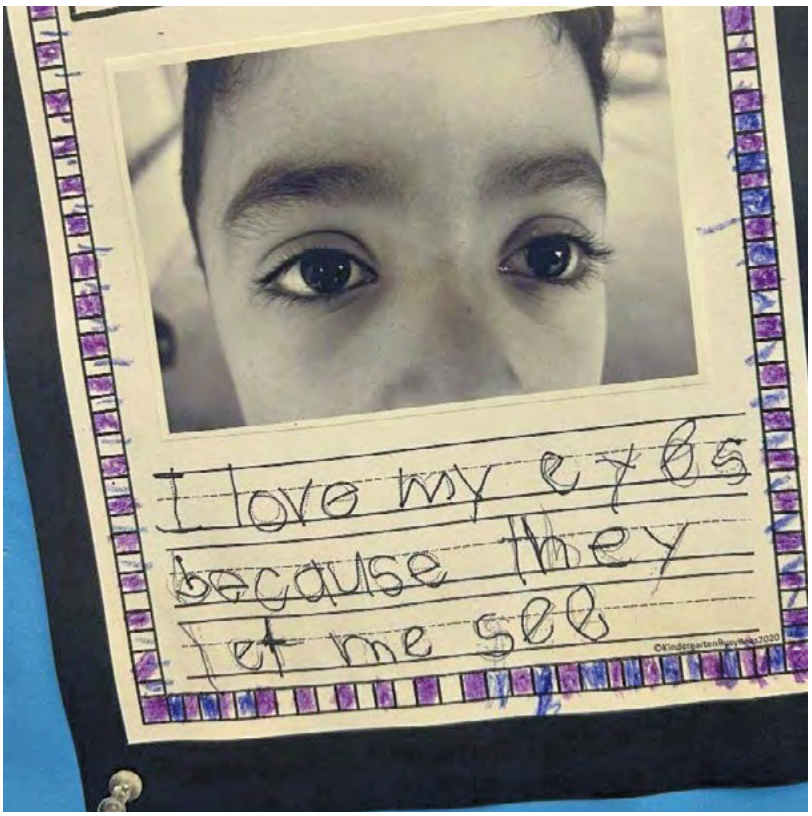


Tara Grings
Principal

A Day in the Life of a Kindergartener

Kindergarten teachers at Grand View Elementary School recently hosted a heartwarming celebration of A Day in the Life of a Kindergartener during Open House. Among the many delightful projects on display, one standout was inspired by the book The Best Part of Me by Wendy Ewald. In this touching story, students reflected on what makes them unique by describing their favorite feature and explaining why it holds special meaning.

After reading the book, Grand View's young learners had the opportunity to share their favorite parts of themselves. The project featured a personal writing piece alongside a close-up black-and-white photograph of each child's favorite feature. During Open House, the children proudly presented their work to their families, explaining what made their chosen traits so special to them. The evening was filled with pride, joy, and meaningful connections—a true highlight for everyone!



Michelle Krzmarzick
Principal

Buckets of Kindness and a Love for Literacy

Meadows Elementary students have been busy filling their buckets and the buckets of others with kindness and making connections in reading opportunities across all grade levels. Students and staff wrote a compliment for every student and staff member at Meadows and filled the bucket in a popular hallway of our school. This display showed how kindness can fill a bucket and make another person feel like a special part of the team.

Learners have also been reading more than ever and making great strides in their literacy progress. Kindergarteners in Mrs. Radl's class recently enjoyed their Alphabet Tub Time as they sorted letters and experimented with the alphabet.

Students in Grade 4 competed in the Super Literacy Quiz Bowl by reading 14 books, including picture books, and answering questions about them. This fun-filled trivia quiz game is played on school iPads using the Kahoot! app

Amanda Vavao
Principal

Super Literacy Quiz Bowl!

Pacific Elementary held its inaugural third grade Super Literacy Quiz Bowl (SLQB) game recently and Principal Vavao was the proud emcee! SLQB is a book-themed trivia competition for students in grades 3, 4, and 5 that promotes reading and highlights great books. Twenty-five students stepped up to represent their third-grade classes. They read from a list of fifteen books, totaling 1,227 pages.

Thank you to amazing longtime MBUSD parent volunteers Jiyeon Im and Barbara Siegemund-Broka (also a beloved retired MBUSD Library Resource Specialist) for being such wonderful advocates for SLQB and continuing to promote a love of learning in our students year after year. A special thank you to our Pacific PTA and MBEF because the Super Literacy Quiz Bowl wouldn't happen without their generous support! SLQB games will continue at Pacific Elementary with fourth graders and fifth graders. Our other elementary schools are also hosting a Super Literacy Quiz Bowl.

Sharon Witzansky
Principal

Earth Week Celebration

As part of MBUSD's Earth Week celebration, Pennekamp Elementary had the pleasure of welcoming back a very special alumna, Ms. Nancy Schrodes, for an engaging and educational assembly on ocean pollution. Now the Associate Director of Watershed Programs at the environmental nonprofit Heal the Bay, Ms. Schrodes returned to her former school to share the importance of protecting our oceans and marine life.

During the assembly, students learned about local watersheds and how trash and other pollutants are carried by urban runoff through the storm drain system, eventually reaching the ocean. Ms. Schrodes explained how this pollution impacts marine life—through ingestion and entanglement—and how it affects beachgoers, including the importance of waiting three days after a storm before swimming, and swimming at least 100 yards away from a discharging outfall.

Students were also introduced to simple, practical ways they can help protect the ocean.

The Pennekamp community is grateful to Heal the Bay and Ms. Schrodes for educating and inspiring our young Dragons to take action and make a positive impact on the planet.

Katie Cavallaro
Principal

TK Students Discover the Water Cycle

Robinson Elementary TK students had an engaging, hands-on experience in the science lab. The lesson began with full-group instruction, where Mrs. Ibrahim introduced the different stages of the water cycle: evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. Next, students broke into table groups. Each station had beakers filled with water, which were topped with shaving cream, and a palette of colored water with droppers. In this experiment, the water in the beakers represented air, and the shaving cream represented clouds. Students used their droppers to apply the colored water on top of the shaving cream clouds.

As a result, they saw the colored water pass through the shaving cream clouds into the water in the beaker, simulating rain. To make the activity even more relevant, it was actually raining outside at the time of the lesson. This was unplanned but a great opportunity for students to connect the concepts they were learning to real-life weather!

In addition to learning science concepts, learners had an opportunity to practice fine motor skills, follow directions, and cooperate with their table group, all of which are important to their overall development.

Thanks to MBEF for funding the Science Specialist position so all elementary students at Robinson and throughout the District have access to a science lab and hands-on learning.

1431 15th St., Manhattan Beach, CA 90266 • 310/546-7655 • mbp.mbusd.org

Jacqueline O'Sullivan
Director
Early Learning

Building Early Literacy

Teachers at Manhattan Beach Preschool utilize the Heggerty curriculum to engage children in daily practice for phonemic awareness. Like their colleagues in all of our MBUSD elementary schools, preschool teachers help young children develop essential literacy skills, focusing on developing their ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words, which is crucial for later reading and writing development.

Teachers lead students through various activities where they practice skills like rhyming, segmenting sounds, blending sounds, and identifying beginning, middle, and ending sounds using physical movement and tactile experiences. This is the first year of implementation and is one of the many programs used at the preschool to get children ready for school.

Leading the Way in Climate Action and Sustainability

Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Superintendent

The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) is demonstrating what environmental sustainability and climate resiliency mean in practice for education.

Environmental sustainability isn't just about surviving—it's about thriving. LACOE is working toward a regenerative approach that goes beyond minimums, replenishing what is taken from the environment to create better futures for students.

LACOE is developing a comprehensive 5-year Sustainability Action Plan in partnership with the Greater Los Angeles Education Foundation. This strategic roadmap will guide efforts to reduce energy consumption and waste in LACOE-operated schools while also supporting local education agencies with their sustainability goals.

The importance of this work is underscored by student perspectives. LACOE's Student Advisory Council consistently ranks climate among their top three priorities. Students have expressed that people cannot defend something they're not intimately familiar with, highlighting why environmental education matters.

On May 1st, LACOE hosted its 4th Green Schools Symposium at the Natural History Museum, designed to be "inspirational, educational, and actionable" for attendees. Participants will leave with practical knowledge about making their schools greener.

LACOE's green initiatives extend beyond planning to action, with programs including outdoor marine field study, Earth Month listening sessions and Clean Air Day pledges.

While some sustainability work happens behind the scenes—like HVAC upgrades, aerator faucets, and energy-efficient building materials—the impact is significant even when not immediately visible.

Environmental sustainability and education share the same goal: helping students thrive in the future. The work LACOE does today creates the conditions for that success tomorrow.

Whether you're preparing to transfer, train for a career, or learn a new skill - we have what you need to make your next move. Learn more at: **www.elcamino.edu/explore**.

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El Camino College

Helping Students Find Joy, Voice and Balance

As the school year draws to a close and we look ahead to summer, I find myself thinking not just about academic milestones, but about the emotional and mental space our students are navigating right now.

This school year has brought new ideas, new conversations, and new directions for education. Our students are paying attention. They're curious, engaged and thinking deeply about the world around them. Even when the issues are complex, they're asking thoughtful questions and seeking to understand how changes might affect their lives and their schools.

Now more than ever, our students need to know that their voice matters. That even in uncertain times, they are not powerless. One way we're supporting this is through the L.A. County Superintendent Student Advisory Council, which brings together student leaders from across the district to share their perspectives and help shape district priorities. These conversations have been eye-opening and inspiring.

Building on that work, the Los Angeles County Office of Education is proud to be hosting an upcoming Student Empowerment Summit on June 20,2025, a day designed to spark dialogue and equip students with the skills, resources and tools they need to thrive in their schools and classrooms. This is an opportunity to build connections, share experiences and gain practical strategies for academic, emotional and social success. It's one more way we are affirming that students are not just the future, they are part of the solution today.

At the same time, we recognize that thriving isn't just about having a voice, it's about balance. As adults, we must encourage our students to live full, joyful lives. A whole, healthy life includes moments of play, creativity, connection and rest. Whether it's sports, art, service or quiet reflection, students need time and space to discover what brings them joy and makes them feel whole.

May is a season of transition. As each school year ends, new opportunities emerge. Let's help our students step into those possibilities with confidence and hope. Let's model optimism, encourage balance and continue to create the kind of schools where every student can feel seen, heard and supported.

Because in the end, our greatest success isn't just helping students achieve—it's helping them thrive.

Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D. *Superintendent*
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Dr. Shari Sweetnam

Buckle Up! AI is Ready for Takeoff!

Let's face it. Over the past 15 years, younger generations have become our go-to technology experts. They quickly mastered new tech and guided us through the intricacies of smartphones and gadgets. As a generation, we were initially behind, but we embraced our young leaders, provided they stayed in their lane, of course. However, we've now reached a point where basic tech knowledge is widespread, leading to a new division driven by the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

There's no question that AI is a transformative force, more impactful and game-changing than any previous technology. While excitement and fear about its potential abound, one thing is certain: AI's growth will undoubtedly affect everyone, and this is a crucial point to understand.

My focus is on embracing how AI can push advancements that enhance various aspects of life. Yet, there's a new cultural evolution to consider, viewed through the lens of 'Innovation vs. Digital Distraction.'

AI is opening new doors previously unexplored, serving as a conduit for the expression of unique ideas. It inspires deeper thinking, boosts creativity, and helps develop more innovative solutions. Witnessing its ability to supercharge growth and productivity is truly mind-blowing.

Yet, not everyone embraces or pays attention to its potential. The divide is no longer between young and old, but between those motivated to learn and those content to serve as mere data sources for AI, buried in social apps and entertainment.

Like it or not, AI is becoming a critical factor in personal and societal evolution, marking a significant new chapter in our technological journey. Now more than ever, we must understand this movement while making a concerted effort to unplug, step away from the machines, and fortify our personal relationships and experiences.

Just remember whatever social experiences you believe that you are having online will be less and less "human derived." My hope is that it will allow us to more clearly delineate and respect the need for each aspect of life during this new phase of evolution driven by AI.

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