



Bellflower Unified School District

Media Release

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Bellflower Unified Earns WASC Accreditation for Innovative Independent Study Program

BELLFLOWER – Bellflower Unified’s highly innovative Las Flores Home Education Independent Study Academy has earned a three-year initial accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

The TK-10 school, which offers a blend of homeschool support and core curriculum, was praised by a WASC visiting committee for effective and caring leadership, parent engagement, strong use of technology and an emphasis on hands-on, student learning.

School officials announced the decision on Wednesday.

“This is another in a growing list of significant accomplishments for our independent study program at Las Flores,” Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs said. “I’d like to congratulate our incredible team of teachers, staff and administrators for this well-deserved recognition.”

WASC accreditation affirms the quality of a school’s curriculum. Schools place a WASC stamp on transcripts to let other schools and colleges know they meet accreditation standards. The three-year accreditation is the longest possible during an initial evaluation.

Accreditation is standard for California’s public high schools, many charter and private schools, but Las Flores is at the forefront of a growing trend to accredit public middle and elementary schools.

Bellflower Unified launched the independent study program in 2012-13 to support homeschooled students; it quickly grew from 35 students that year to 170 students in 2016-17.

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TK-8 students follow one of two learning models – traditional or core. In the traditional model, students learn at home with support from Las Flores teachers. In the core model, students attend Las Flores three days a week to take core classes. Most students follow the core model.

Students in both programs may also attend an enrichment program on Fridays that includes lessons in Mandarin and music as well as science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) topics.

In 2016-17, Las Flores expanded to include grades nine and 10 – a rare offering for homeschool support programs given the difficulty of creating accredited programs recognized by colleges for admission.

High school students follow a traditional or blended instructional model. In the traditional model, students learn at home via online courses that meet the eligibility requirements for UC and CSU. They submit assignments and take tests at Las Flores.

In the blended model – followed by all students currently enrolled – students attend math and English classes at Las Flores three days a week, and take science, health, social science and a world-language course online. As with the traditional model, all classes meet UC/CSU eligibility requirements.

The WASC team, which visited Las Flores in November 2016, noted that the school's intimate nature and hands-on approach give students a greater chance to succeed.

“Behavior issues which often impede instructional time are not apparent on the site. All staff and students are held to high expectations both academically and non-academically,” the team's report states. “Students enjoy the small classroom size and the positive interactions with their teachers. The students feel that the teachers genuinely care about them.”

Parents at Las Flores are intimately involved in the school's program, meeting regularly with teachers and administrators and advising on key operational matters.

Principal Tami Zylla said the accreditation is a key step as the high school program expands. Bellflower Unified will add 11th grade in 2017-18 and 12th-grade in 2018-19. Each addition will require a new review by WASC.

“This is a big deal,” Zylla said. “We are all very excited.”

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