



Bonita Unified

SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Bonita Unified's Oak Mesa Elementary Honored as a 2023 California Distinguished School

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Oak Mesa Elementary School has been named a California Distinguished School by the California Department of Education (CDE) for the fourth time, celebrating the school's excellence in closing the achievement gap and achieving exceptional student performance.

Oak Mesa, which is among 356 elementary schools honored by the CDE this year, was previously named a California Distinguished School in 2008, 2012 and 2020. Schools were selected by analyzing data from the 2021-22 school year reported on the California School Dashboard, including assessment results, chronic absenteeism, suspension rates and socioeconomic data.

"While being named a California Distinguished School for the second time in three years is an exceptional honor that we are proud to receive, it is not the accolades that drive the work we do at Oak Mesa Elementary," Principal Steven Patterson said. "Rather, it is the love we have for each of our students, and the will and urgency we have to prepare them for their future endeavors. I am incredibly grateful for the outstanding teachers, staff and school community we have at Oak Mesa, and the way in which we all work together to ensure the very best for our students."

According to the Dashboard, Oak Mesa Elementary students reached "very high" levels of achievement on state assessments in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics during 2021-22, scoring 65.1 points above the standard scores in ELA and 35.6 points above the standard scores in math.

Oak Mesa's comprehensive approach to fostering academic achievement is supported by a highly collaborative team of teachers and staff, whose mission is to fully understand their students and identify their strengths and opportunities for growth.

The schoolwide focus on collaboration and understanding students' needs, balanced with a strong emphasis on social-emotional support, was instrumental in supporting the transition back to full-time, in-person instruction in August 2021 after a year of remote learning.

Teachers and staff developed clear instructional plans for their students and utilized both large and small group instruction, as well as in-class support from the school's full-time reading and math intervention teachers, to mitigate any learning loss that occurred while ensuring students are up-to-date on their current lessons. Patterson said reading intervention begins as early as kindergarten in an effort to ensure every Oak Mesa student has the skills and tools to succeed, regardless of age.

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Patterson added that small group instruction has supported academic growth in math, particularly in grades two through five. Fourth- and fifth-grade students have been sorted into small groups based on their learning abilities and strengths, allowing teachers to provide instruction that is appropriate to each group's needs. Those groups can change throughout the trimester, ensuring instruction remains equitable.

Oak Mesa has also made strides in closing the achievement gap in math; during the 2021-22 school year, the school's socioeconomically disadvantaged students scored 10.3 points above the standard on state math assessments.

In the 2022-23 school year, the achievement gap in math between students who socioeconomically disadvantaged students and those who are not – particularly in grades two through four – has dropped from 25% at the beginning of the school year to around 10% at the end of the first trimester.

Using the District's research-based reading program – which aims to ensure grade-level reading by third grade – Oak Mesa Elementary also provides robust ELA instruction that includes the use of the Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonetics and Sight Words (SIPPS), which bolsters phonetic skills for new and struggling students in grades K-2. Instruction is also supported by the Benchmark Advanced Reading Program, a core ELA program that covers all K-5 ELA and English language development standards.

Oak Mesa's academic success is bolstered by a schoolwide focus on creating a positive, welcoming learning environment and an emphasis on social-emotional wellness. The school's counseling team checks in with families regularly, providing resources as needed and making sure students feel supported regardless of any academic, social or personal challenges they are experiencing. The combination of engaging instruction and sincere, caring teachers and staff have also positively impacted Oak Mesa's attendance rates, Patterson added, because students feel welcomed and look forward to coming to school.

"Bonita Unified School District is guided by core values of equity, mastery and a focus on results – all of which have played a key role in Oak Mesa Elementary's holistic approach to fostering student achievement," Bonita Unified Superintendent Matt Wien said. "Congratulations to the entire Oak Mesa Elementary School community on its well-deserved recognition as a 2023 California Distinguished School."

PHOTO:

BUSD_OAKMESA: Oak Mesa Elementary Principal Steven Patterson, center, is joined by teachers and staff at the Bonita Unified Board of Education meeting on Feb. 1, where Oak Mesa was honored by the Board and the City of La Verne for its designation as a 2023 California Distinguished School.

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