



Fontana Unified School District

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 19, 2021

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Fontana Unified Elementary School to Bolster Personal Connections through Care Package, Teddy Bear Distribution

FONTANA, CA – Redwood Elementary School counselor Eduardo Valencia has seen firsthand the socio-emotional toll that COVID-19 has taken on his students and their families, prompting him to launch a drive-through event that will help students, teachers and families feel connected and supported.

During home visits to deliver school resources to families, Valencia has heard countless stories of personal and financial loss that are causing students to disengage from their studies.

To assist in providing comfort to Redwood families and to reestablish much-needed personal connections, Redwood Elementary will distribute teddy bears and care packages to every student, teacher, and staff member – 600 in all – during a weeklong, after-school drive-through event beginning Monday, Feb. 22.

“When I made my visits, I felt the pain of what our families are going through, but also saw the joy of students seeing someone from the school,” Valencia said. “Whatever I was bringing to the family, the students embraced it like it was their most precious possession. I realized every student wants something to hug, a teddy bear or a security blanket. And our staff needs them too.”

Each bear will be outfitted with a T-shirt emblazoned with the Redwood Elementary logo. Included in the packages will be a code that allows families to access an unlimited number of virtual e-books, personalized messages and poems from Redwood staff, and a resource booklet provided by the Fontana Unified Multi-Tiered System of Supports Department.

The bilingual resource booklet will contain tips on how to bolster mental wellness, including anxiety-reducing exercises like deep breathing, coping skills such as watching a favorite TV show or reading a book, geometric mandala coloring sheets to alleviate stress, instructions on how to construct a worry jar and a contact number for District healthcare partner Care Solace.

“We know our students are struggling. Most students have either lost a loved one to COVID-19 or know someone who has,” Fontana Unified Social Emotional Support Specialist Elizabeth Romanio said. “Something to hold and squeeze provides students with an outlet to ease their frustrations and provides a connection to the school. Students need to understand that their school community loves them.”

Valencia has received an outpouring of community support to realize his vision, including contributions from Redwood and District-level PTAs, Redwood faculty and staff, parents and the nonprofit Foundation of Hope.

“This is my community. These are my kids,” Valencia said. “These teddy bears are an investment in the future of our children. Students will be more willing to come back to class because they know the school has done something for them.”

Valencia hopes the program will be replicated throughout the District and inspire other districts to reach out and connect with its families in similar ways.

“In these unprecedented times, even the simplest gesture of kindness sends a message of positivity and compassion to those who need it the most,” Superintendent Randal S. Bassett said. “We are proud to have counselors like Eduardo Valencia in our District.”

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