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Baldwin Park Unified Clubs Serve as a Safe Space for LGBTQ Students

BALDWIN PARK – Baldwin Park High School’s Peace, Pride and Produce Garden, [launched in 2021](#), was designed to be a safe and welcoming space for the school’s LGBTQIA+ community. Since then, the school has expanded mental health and wellness resources available to students.

The Peace, Pride and Produce Garden was created through a collaboration between the BPHS National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs, and given life by a \$10,000 “50 States, 50 Voices” grant from the It Gets Better Project, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth.

“We saw this space next to our classroom and thought we could turn it into a combination garden and safe space for our LGBTQ students,” Baldwin Park High NAMI advisor Nicole Melamed said. “We have filled the garden with banners celebrating LGBTQ people of note and positive affirmations. It’s a place where students can learn how to be themselves and how to love themselves.”

The garden is just one part of a campus-wide mental health initiative that includes monthly activities such as Mindful Mondays, Thoughtful Thursdays and Foodie Fridays. The club advisors also secured an exclusive partnership with the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens, which encourages Baldwin Park High students to take nature walks and explore the grounds with their friends and family, free of charge.

Mindful Mondays, open to all students and staff and conducted before school, includes 30-minute workshops on student-recommended topics such as breathing and coping strategies, meditation techniques and stress management. Thoughtful Thursday workshops are available for an hour during the school day. On Foodie Fridays, students sample a California agriculture product.

“The theme days have proven very popular,” Baldwin Park High GSA advisor Michelle Humason said. “The students are eager to attend and learn. It’s all part of an all-encompassing effort to provide every student access to mental health and wellness resources, help them eat healthier, expand their horizons outside of school, embrace their identities and advocate on behalf of their classmates.”

MORE

In a culture of high expectations and academic rigor and an environment of support, understanding, and emotional safety, all Baldwin Park Unified School District students will graduate with a valued and highly respected diploma, prepared with the relevant skills, knowledge, and personal attributes necessary for success in a university or other institution of higher education and/or any post-secondary options of their choice.



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In addition to being a safe space, the Peace, Pride and Produce Garden doubles as a vegetable and flower garden, with flint corn, pumpkins, cucumbers, a pesto garden, a salsa garden, succulents, and milkweed plants to create a population of Monarch butterflies.

The garden has been further supplemented with grants and donations from a host of partners, including a \$1,500 GroMoreGood Grassroots grant, a \$200 Jane Goodall Foundation grant, plant donations courtesy of Present Perfect Nursery in Pasadena, and assistance from the Lowe's Hardware Eagle Scout Project to build the garden beds.

Baldwin Park High's NAMI club was formed in 2015 as part of the school's mental health pathway. The GSA club was established in 2010 by Baldwin Park High graduate Camilla Camaleón, a former BPHS Associated Student Body president who currently serves as president of the San Gabriel Valley LGBTQ Center.

Camaleón has lent her expertise as an educator and activist to Baldwin Park High's mental health and wellness initiative, returning to the school to lead a transgender awareness workshop earlier in the school year. Melamed and Humason are applying for another It Gets Better Project grant in the hopes of creating additional extracurricular LGBTQ resources, with the help of Camaleón.

"Baldwin Park High's Peace, Pride and Produce Garden does more than establish a safe space for our LGBTQ youth, it stands as a symbol of love and understanding for all people," Superintendent Dr. Froilan Mendoza said. "We are indebted to the hard work and dedication of Nicole Melamed and Michelle Humason for having the vision to create the garden for all students."

PHOTOS

03.14.23_BPHS NAMI: Baldwin Park High School NAMI club officers for the 2022-23 school year include (from left to right): NAMI secretary and BPHS junior Jose Bustamante; NAMI president and BPHS senior Sophia Wirth; NAMI vice president and BPHS junior Dao Doan; NAMI treasurer and BPHS junior Jaclyn Phan; NAMI secretary II and BPHS junior Surlvia Chang; and NAMI public relations manager and BPHS junior Michael Jarcia (not pictured).

03.14.23_BPHS Garden: Baldwin Park High School's NAMI and GSA club members created a welcoming garden space for students to relax and interact peers.

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