



Press Release

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Lynwood Unified Staff Helps Raise More Than 75K For Families in Need

Lynwood – Maddie Martinez wasn't sure how she would continue to support her family of five. She had lost her job due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was living perilously off of her savings. Making matters worse, Martinez battles a chronic autoimmune condition that makes her particularly vulnerable to illness.

That's when she happened to see a social media post by Lynwood Unified's Audrey Casas offering help to anyone in need during these trying times. Within days, District staff member Jeff Ballinger, a longtime philanthropist in the community, showed up to her door with bags of food and an excess of love and support.

Casas, Ballinger, and a collection of educators and volunteers across the District have joined forces in private fundraising efforts to help local families work through their challenges. What began as a mission to spread smiles during Spring Break last month, has ballooned into an operation that has raised more than \$75,000 while fortifying the sense of community in Lynwood and beyond.

"It means so much to have them step in and assist my family in this way," Martinez said. "What they are doing is spreading even beyond the people they are helping. I have been able to take some of the food I have been given and share it with neighbors who are also in need."

"That's what it's about. All of us should be taking care of one another."

Casas helped to spearhead the fundraising through her social media campaign. She initially wanted to provide gift cards to families ranging from \$50 to \$100. She reached out to family, friends, and a mutual acquaintance connected her with LUSD alumnus Patty Rodriguez, a senior producer at KIIS-FM Radio. Not only did Rodriguez sponsor 10 families, but she promoted the efforts on her Instagram account sending the donations surging.

Casas set up a pickup station in Lynwood where families were able to accept the gift cards along with other essential needs.

"We had an initial list of families in need that we wanted to target for help, but once the movement got going on social media we were introduced to so many more families and received more resources to help," Casas said. "It just speaks to the hearts of this community that everyone was so willing to help."

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The Lynwood Unified School District is dedicated to offering students a world-class education to prepare them for success in college and career in the 21st century. Under its Achieving Greatness Initiative, the district is realigning all aspects of its organization to strengthen and expand instructional programs, enrichment and extracurricular activities, and support system for students and staff. For more information, visit www.lynwood.k12.ca.us.

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Ballinger has been helping the surrounding Lynwood community through philanthropy for more than 20 years. He serves as the club advisor for the District's Helping Hands program, which serves homeless and disadvantaged throughout the year.

Ballinger had already begun raising money for families during school closures when he learned about Casas' efforts. In assisting one another, they have reached more grateful families.

Raphael Reza, a former student of Ballinger's at Hosler Middle School, is among them. He was running low on food and was wary of exposing his eight-year-old son to potential infection at a food bank when he saw Ballinger's invitation for assistance on Facebook.

"It's a blessing. It's a huge blessing," said Reza, who received a cash app card from local donations. "I hope that people overcome any pride or embarrassment and take advantage of the wonderful services being offered. Nothing should come between you and taking care of your family."

Families who need assistance can email audreycasas@gmail.com, jeffballingerjeffballinger@yahoo.com, or reach out via Instagram at [@theaudreymachine](https://www.instagram.com/theaudreymachine).

Lynwood Unified has also been assisting families through the Lynwood Partners Educational Foundation's (LPEF) COVID-19 emergency fund. LPEF is working with staff to meet the needs of students and families. Additionally, the Lynwood Rotary Club donated to the District's food pantry to dramatically increase the number of families who are served.

"I am proud that the challenges of our community have brought out the best in us," LUSD Superintendent Gudiel R. Crosthwaite. "The work of Audrey, Jeff, and everyone who has contributed to lifting up the community is inspiring. We are truly standing together."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

050720_LUSD_FUNDRAISER1: Local families have received gift cards, food, and supplies through private fundraising efforts to help the community work through challenges.

050720_LUSD_FUNDRAISER2: The District set up a pickup station during April where families were able to safely accept gift cards along with other essential needs.

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The mission of **Lynwood Unified School District**, the cultivator of innovative thinkers, is to ensure each student fearlessly achieves his or her highest academic and personal aspirations while contributing to the greater society through a unique system distinguished by:

- ★ People of great character who inspire and lead by example
- ★ The instilling of courage to be creative
- ★ The transformative uses of technology
- ★ Safe and clean environments
- ★ The honoring of all voices of our community