



# Bonita Unified

## SCHOOL DISTRICT

### NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## Bonita Unified Middle School Students Provide Leadership as WEB Mentors

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – A select group of Ramona Middle School eighth-grade students have demonstrated their leadership capabilities while helping their sixth-grade classmates acclimate to a new school through the Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) program, an elective that eases the transition from elementary school to middle school.

Whether leading a Friday lunchtime dance party, organizing a game of Knockout, or posting inspirational messages around campus such as “Be Kind” and “Be the Light,” Ramona WEB mentors dedicate themselves to ensuring that incoming students receive the support and resources they need to navigate their way through a new school system with more teachers, classes, students, and academic and social responsibilities.

“Entering middle school can be an overwhelming process for many students,” Ramona WEB coordinator Stephen Duran said. “Suddenly they are dealing with a whole new set of expectations and can use some friendly guidance. WEB is geared toward making the transition as easy, as safe, as positive, and as inclusive as possible. WEB mentors display leadership and promote kindness. They are a very special group.”

Duran has been coordinating the program for the last three years and has seen firsthand how WEB has changed the culture on campus, especially after school closures precipitated months of distance learning. During this time, WEB students expanded their outreach to include organizing an outdoor movie night, connecting with Ramona faculty and staff, and making plans for a campus wellness garden that can be used as a safe space for students and teachers.

WEB mentors are paired up at the beginning of the school year and are assigned a group of 10 to 12 sixth-grade students. The mentors remain with their students from orientation until the end of the year, dispensing advice and finding ways to engage them. Ramona WEB mentor Isabela Gonzalez recalls the day she brought P.A. speakers out to the quad and connected her phone to play some dance music at lunch, initiating Ramona’s first Fiesta Friday celebration.

“I think we started it on Valentine’s Day, just for fun. And my WEB kids ran up to me and said, hey can you play ‘Cupid Shuffle,’ and then everybody just started dancing. It was really cool to see. Now it’s become a regular part of the school schedule,” Gonzalez said. “I love being a WEB mentor. It teaches you to be brave and put yourself out there.”

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For the 2022-23 school year, WEB will partner with the Associated Student Body (ASB) and unite the two leadership groups. Duran will move to ASB adviser, while Ramona eighth-grade teacher Tracy Herr will take over as WEB coordinator. Herr has undergone extensive WEB training through its parent organization, the Boomerang Project, and has experience as a WEB coordinator.

“What I love about WEB is that you are teaching students how to do middle school,” Herr said. “You are teaching them academic and social skills. How do they handle it if they fall behind in their studies? Our WEB mentors are there to help them. Stephen has built such a great culture at Ramona and made such a positive reputation for WEB. I want to continue what he has started, bring our WEB and ASB kids together and help maintain our positive campus culture.”

Ramona seventh-grade students who wish to serve as WEB mentors in the next school year fill out an application, then undergo a rigorous group interview process, led by current WEB students and observed by a panel of Ramona teachers. Students who distinguish themselves by being cheerful and supportive are selected as the next year’s WEB mentors.

#### PHOTO CAPTIONS:

**BUSD\_WEB1:** Ramona Middle School’s Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) program helps ease the transition from elementary school to middle school by pairing eighth-grade student mentors with incoming sixth-grade students. Pictured from left to right, Ramona WEB mentors Madison Salessi, Alexyss Van Valkenburgh, WEB coordinator Stephen Duran, WEB mentors Isabella Tate and Adalyn Tibbetts.

**BUSD\_WEB2:** Ramona Middle School eighth-grade students and WEB mentors Mireille Mise and Jayla Perez discuss school life with sixth-grade students. The WEB program turns older students into mentors who help incoming Ramona students navigate their first year of middle school.

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