



# Fontana Unified School District

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## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Student Petition Leads to Fontana Unified Renaming School to Honor O’Day Short Family’s Legacy

**FONTANA, CA** – Fontana Unified School District voted to rename Randall Pepper Elementary School to O’Day Short Elementary – shining a light on a dark moment in Fontana’s history while affirming the District’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion – during its Board of Education meeting on Sept. 4.

Southridge Tech Middle School seventh grader Cyrus Moss first set the wheels in motion for the name change when he presented the Fontana Unified Board with a petition signed by 132 members of the community at its March 13 meeting. In accordance with administrative regulations, FUSD was unable to act on the petition until its Sept. 4 meeting.

Fontana Unified’s Board used a traditional roll-call vote to commemorate the historic moment for the O’Day Short family, which is remembered for breaking Fontana’s color barrier in 1945. The name change will officially take effect for the 2025-26 school year.

All four members of the African-American family: father O’Day, wife Helen, and children Carol Ann and Barry Short died after their house burst into flames on Dec. 16, 1945. Randall Pepper Elementary was then built on the same site in 1950.

Moss learned about the O’Day Short Family during a school project and then made it his mission to speak out and bring about change for the Short family.

“This hurt deeply because I am a young, black man who attended Randall Pepper Elementary for preschool,” Moss said of the story of the Short family. “It is painful knowing O’Day Short’s two children were around the same age as my little brother and me and were murdered in this fire. I believe we need to make things right and change the name of the school to honor the Short family because they are the true owners of the land the school is built on.”

When Fontana Unified’s Board voted on the name change an emotional release was felt throughout the room, with standing ovations and Moss shedding tears alongside his family in the front row.

Before the vote, Fontana Mayor Acquanetta Warren, San Bernardino County Supervisor Jesse Armendarez, and Bishop Emory James delivered speeches from the podium at the meeting, which was also attended by San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools representative Norm Nunez.

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Momentum began building for Fontana Unified to rename Randall Pepper Elementary throughout 2023-24. In December 2023, Randall Pepper Elementary dedicated the O’Day Short Family Unity Garden on its campus. About three months later, Moss submitted his petition to the Board for the name change.

Fontana Unified created a School Naming Committee comprised of current and retired employees, current administrators, and parent and student representatives. The group conducted research and discussed the name change before unanimously voting to recommend renaming Randall Pepper Elementary to the O’Day Short Elementary School.

“We are incredibly honored to be a part of this movement and hope that this can be used as a catalyst in the continuation of positive change in our community,” Randall Pepper Elementary Principal Theresa Gomez said. “As an elementary school, we create the future daily by supporting our students academically and in their social well-being. By renaming our school to O’Day Short Elementary, we will be also honoring the legacy of the Short Family in what they wanted for the future of their family and others.”

The O’Day Short family purchased and began building a home on a vacant, five-acre lot at Randall Avenue and Pepper Avenue in Fontana at a time when African-Americans were forbidden to live south of Baseline Avenue. The O’Day Short family received threats of violence and offers from the Chamber of Commerce to buy back the property before their house was set ablaze.

An arson investigator hired by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) determined the fire was deliberately set from the exterior, according to a [2016 article from the Daily Bulletin](#).

“This is a profound step in acknowledging our community’s history and honoring the legacy of the O’Day Short family,” Superintendent Miki R. Inbody said. “We want to ensure future generations are aware of and understand the significance of this moment in our city’s history. We are proud to celebrate the courage of the O’Day Short family and to foster a more inclusive and respectful community for our students.”

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**FUSD\_O’DAY\_SHORT1:** Randall Pepper Elementary Principal Theresa Gomez (front row, second to left), Assistant Principal Veronica Joya (front row, second from right), and Southridge Tech Middle School student Cyrus Moss (front row, center) celebrate the renaming of Randall Pepper Elementary School to O’Day Short Elementary School at Fontana Unified’s Board meeting on Sept. 4.

**FUSD\_O’DAY\_SHORT2:** Southridge Tech Middle School seventh grader Cyrus Moss leads the Fontana Unified Board of Education meeting in the pledge of allegiance on Sept. 4. During the meeting, FUSD voted to rename Randall Pepper Elementary School to O’Day Short Elementary School to honor the O’Day Short Family’s legacy, prompted by a petition Moss first filed with the District back in May.

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