



BUENA PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT

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PRESS RELEASE

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Buena Park School District Supports Wellness with New Counseling Services

BUENA PARK, CA – Buena Park School District has expanded counseling services for its elementary schools, providing its youngest students with additional social-emotional support while teaching them about the importance of physical well-being.

Each elementary school in the District now has a full-time dedicated counselor on campus; in addition, the District has contracted with Outreach Concern, a non-profit counseling agency, to have interns work as part-time counselors as they earn credits toward their degrees in social work and psychology.

Director of Educational Programs Seri Hwang said the addition of counselors to all school sites is partially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which moved in-person learning to at-home learning for most of the 2020-21 school year. This year, counselors are focused on strengthening student's social skills, which may have been impacted by the pandemic.

“At every one of our school sites, our counselors have become a huge support to our students,” Hwang said. “Our counselors are helping to improve overall wellness, modeling and coaching how to appropriately interact and communicate with others, and encouraging students to make and welcome new friends.”

Each counselor has an on-campus space where students can unwind, focus on their wellness and express themselves. They also provide support during recess and lunchtime.

Counselor Ivonne Mena said a key component is making sure that students exercise and move around to help them work out their emotions, and that physical activities help ‘break the ice’ to get students talking and invested in their school community.

Mena, who has served as the District's main counselor since 2014, now focuses solely on Corey School. The District also hired Melissa James as Emery School's counselor, Desarie Reynosa as Pendleton School's counselor, Melissa Melara as Gilbert School's counselor and Alejandra Salazar as Whitaker School's counselor.

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“Myself and the other counselors are helping to boost social involvement in our students in relaxed ways – whether it’s by playing board games or even tossing a ball around with positivity sayings,” Mena said. “It feels great to provide focus on one school because now I’m hearing great feedback from parents and teachers about how I’m helping so many students.”

Salazar said she is eager to dispel negative conceptions about counseling and instead teach students and parents about the benefits of self-regulating emotions and healthy mental habits.

“It feels great to know that I’m part of students’ emotional foundation,” Salazar said. “The help that counselors provide to students will impact who they become in the future.”

All District counselors receive regular training to build wellness techniques, strategies, and research-based practices to create a welcoming school atmosphere for students to have the best school experience.

“We’re so happy to provide additional emotional support to our students, because we all know the importance of mental health – especially for young students,” Superintendent Dr. Ramon Miramontes said. “The work our counselors are doing is ensuring that our campuses are filled with happy, healthy students who are ready to achieve.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

BUENAPARK_COUNSELOR1: Counselor Ivonne Mena has been with the Buena Park School District since 2014, but is now focusing on providing emotional support to Corey School students thanks to an increased District push for mental health wellness.

BUENAPARK_COUNSELOR2: Whitaker School Counselor Alejandra Salazar is new to the Buena Park School District, but she said that she is eager to help her students build good emotional foundations.

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