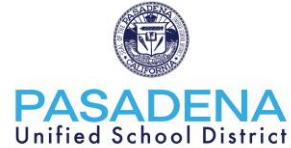


MEDIA RELEASE



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Pasadena, Altadena Residents Share Hugs, Seek Relief During Pasadena Unified Community Connector Event

Pasadena, CA — Families and neighbors shared hugs with teachers, children danced and played games, and the Pasadena Unified School District community, looking for stability and normalcy after a week of devastating fires and loss, took its first steps in rebuilding and reopening campuses during a Community Connector event held at Pasadena City College on Jan. 17.

Embracing Pasadena Unified's theme for the school year of "The Power of Us," hundreds of Pasadena, Altadena, and Sierra Madre families came together to commiserate over their grief and enjoy food and treats during the afternoon event.

District administrators, faculty, and staff, led by Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Blanco, were on hand to provide crucial information on how to re-enroll children at school, provide care packages and resources, and let everyone in the community know that Pasadena Unified will come back stronger than ever.

"I hope that we can bring a little bit of joy to one another during this very challenging time for all of you," Blanco said while addressing attendees. "Every PUSD school was impacted. Some of you have been devastated and impacted. I want you to know that you are in our hearts and minds every moment. When you look at one another, you can see the power of us."

Assistant Superintendent of Student Wellness & Support Services Dr. Julie Reynoso worked quickly to organize the event, calling on a volunteer staff of "doers" to support displaced residents and staff in a setting that would counter the chaos and confusion of recent events with an afternoon of calm.

"It was a daunting task, but I don't believe in the word impossible," Reynoso said. "The response was tremendous. We wanted the day to feel like a party, with food, music, and lots of fun activities for the kids. We got all of that and more. There is so much compassion and love in this community. It's their home, it's our home, and it was heartwarming and rewarding to see everyone here."

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Mamma's Pizza, Raffi's Mediterranean Catering, Jake's Roadhouse, Perry's Joint, the Raspados Factory, and Wetzel's Pretzels were among the local vendors that donated meals and snacks for the afternoon. Music was provided by DJ Kat, and Courtney Linsey of Harambee Ministries served as emcee.

PUSD's Pasadena LEARNs afterschool program was joined by community schools, parent resources centers, and several art providers such as Lakeshore Learning, Armory Arts, the USC/Asian Pacific Museum, and Bloom Arts, supplying a wealth of art activities for young children, including using wood sticks to create messages of hope and gratitude, printmaking, and origami.

The spirit and determination of the day was epitomized by Octavia E. Butler Magnet School English teacher Roslyn Terre, along with her husband and two young daughters, who were on a train headed home from a vacation when they heard the fire had enveloped their neighborhood. After arriving in Los Angeles, the family raced up the hill to their home, but got caught in a firestorm and had to retreat. Later, they discovered that their house had burned down.

Terre's husband, Brock St. James, said the family is just happy to be alive and, despite the tragic setback, are ready to return to Pasadena to help reestablish and rebuild their community.

"This is an amazing day, and much needed," St. James said. "We are proud Altadena residents and want to be the first ones back in the city to watch it grow again. We are like the Phoenix, rising from the ashes. We are grateful for PUSD for providing this support for the families. We've connected with so many people today and feel very blessed."

The event was so well-received that the District is considering staging more community connectors throughout the school year, or possibly turning the day into an annual event.

"I got so many compliments throughout the day," Reynoso said. "People asked me when the next event was, some people told me it was hard to get to the event but they felt like they had to be there, even though they lost everything. I can see this being an annual tradition. Recovering from the Eaton Fire will be the longest marathon we've been through, but we will come back together stronger than ever."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

PUSD_CONNECTOR1: Pasadena Unified School District held a Community Connector event on Jan. 17, offering a space for connection and support in the wake of the Eaton Fire.

PUSD_CONNECTOR2: Families and neighbors shared hugs with teachers, children danced and played games, and the Pasadena Unified School District community took its first steps in rebuilding and reopening campuses during a Community Connector event on Jan. 17.

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PUSD_CONNECTOR3: Embracing Pasadena Unified's theme for the school year of "The Power of Us," hundreds of Pasadena, Altadena, and Sierra Madre families came together for a Community Connector event on Jan. 17.

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