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Bonita Unified Choir Students Celebrate Selection to SCVA Junior High Honor Choir

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Now in her 12th year, Ramona Middle School music teacher Caitlin Shaw has provided the crucial link between elementary school novice singers and Bonita High School’s prestigious Concert Choir and Chamber Singers. With more than 270 students in her program, Shaw teaches singers how to harmonize, read music, and prepare for auditions and live performances.

Channeling Shaw’s mentorship and guidance, 11 Ramona music students, along with three Bonita High School freshmen, have been selected to join the Southern California Vocal Association’s (SCVA) 2025 Junior High Honor Choir, underscoring the hard work and dedication that epitomize Bonita Unified’s successful and award-winning Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) programs. Ramona placed more students in the honor choir than any other Southern California school. The SCVA Junior High Honor Choir 2025 spring performance will be held at 6 p.m. on Saturday, May 3 at Portola High School in Irvine.

“The SCVA Junior High Honor Choir selections are a testament to the tremendous Bonita Unified VAPA program, including all of our wonderful teachers and amazing students, who are eager to learn and grow,” Shaw said. “I feel honored to teach these students, with all their passion and love for singing. As middle schoolers, they are establishing their foundation in music.”

Ramona Middle School eighth-graders Abigail Kueny, Emma Du Haime, Mia Mathess, and Emily Garcia were selected for the choir, along with seventh-graders Qian Qian Li and Marlo Poindexter, and sixth-graders Lily Nord, Zachary Li, Amelie Iavicoli, Kay Luna Masud, and Xandrine Torrez. They will be joined by Bonita High School freshmen Gabrielle Nava, Jersev Adriano, and Gabrielle Navarro.

Kueny and Du Haime, who along with Li were selected to the honor choir for the second time, first joined the District’s music program as fourth-graders. Both students doubted they had the skills and talent to eventually join the school choir. Guided by elementary school music teachers Heidi Bird and Heidi Brightbill, the pair found their voices and the confidence to advance to the next level at Ramona.

“In the beginning I was tone deaf and I worried I wouldn’t be good enough,” Du Haime said. “I’ve learned so much from my teachers and Ms. Shaw is the most amazing teacher, she is so passionate.”

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Kueny made good progress in elementary school, but it wasn't until she got to Ramona Middle School and received an opportunity to harmonize with her classmates that it all began to click for her.

"I doubted myself until I got to Ramona," Kueny said. "I give Ms. Shaw a lot of credit for my development. She cares about students and will work with you when you're struggling. My experience in choir has shown me that you can be good at something you didn't think you were so good at."

Shaw's exuberance and professionalism allow music students the freedom to find their voice in the program. Beginning in sixth grade, students learn how to harmonize, starting with two-part harmonies in sixth grade, three-part harmonies in seventh grade, and four-part harmonies in eighth grade. Shaw also teaches her students how to read music—a requirement for elite-level choirs like SCVA.

With the biggest choir program in the District, Ramona has a variety of classes and ensembles, including the Viking Chorale (sixth-graders), Bella Voce (show choir), Encore, and the school's elite vocal group, the Troubadours. The Chorale, Encore and Troubadour groups all received "Superior" ratings by the SCVA during an adjudication on March 3.

Ramona's choirs performed in the La Verne Sings 2025 gala in February, at Knott's Berry Farm on March 5, and traveled to San Francisco on March 20-23 to perform at the historic Grace Cathedral. They will make their annual visit to Disneyland on May 20.

"I am always amazed at the quality of work and passion that Caitlin Shaw exudes through her leadership of choirs at Ramona Middle School," Bonita High choir director Ryan Yoder said. "She has become a staple in our community and I admire her musicianship. She truly cares about the development of all our students as singers and young people. She is the perfect bridge between our elementary and high school programs and I am grateful to work alongside her."

PHOTOS:

BUSD_SCVA_CHOIR1: Guided by choir director Caitlin Shaw, the Ramona Middle School music program saw 11 of its top singers selected for the Southern California Vocal Association's 2025 Junior High Honor Choir.

BUSD_SCVA_CHOIR2: Bonita High School freshmen Gabrielle Navarro, Jersev Adriano, and Gabrielle Nava were selected to the Southern California Vocal Association's 2025 Junior High Honor Choir.

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