



Fontana Unified School District

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fontana Unified Completes Historic Renaming of O'Day Short Elementary School, Honoring Family's Legacy

FONTANA, CA – Less than 24 hours before the start of the 2025-26 school year, Fontana Unified School District (FUSD) celebrated the renaming of O'Day Short Elementary School on Aug. 5, honoring the courageous legacy of the Short family, who inspired the renaming of the school after breaking Fontana's color barrier at the school site nearly 80 years ago.

Fontana Unified hosted the official renaming ceremony for O'Day Short Elementary – previously named Randall Pepper Elementary School – at the school's campus, drawing a standing-room-only crowd of school and District staff, students, residents, elected officials, and two living relatives of the Short family.

"It is my honor to stand with you as we begin to write a new chapter in this community's history – one that is rooted in truth, courage, and unwavering belief in the dignity of every person," Fontana Unified Superintendent Miki R. Inbody said. "Today, we are choosing remembrance over silence, choosing justice over erasure, and choosing to tell the full story."

The Short family – father O'Day, mother Helen, and children Carol Ann and Barry Short – purchased and built a home on a five-acre lot at Randall and Pepper avenues in Fontana at a time when African-Americans were forbidden to live south of Baseline Avenue. Their home was destroyed by a fire, later determined to be arson, on Dec. 16, 1945, with all four members of the family dying from injuries sustained in the fire. The school was later built on the same site in 1950.

This historic renaming was initiated by Fontana Unified student Cyrus Moss, now a student at Southridge Tech Middle School. Moss learned about the story of the Short family and launched a petition campaign that gained more than 150 signatures. In September 2024, the FUSD Board of Education unanimously voted to rename the school O'Day Short Elementary, effective at the start of the 2025-26 school year.

"The fact that people listened, cared, and supported me being the voice for the Short family shows that using your voice is powerful... To every student here, I want you to know something very important – you matter. No matter what race or skin color, you belong here. This community is yours, too. Never be scared to use your voice because it's powerful; your voice can tear down walls," said Moss, before repeating his message to his peers in Spanish.

Before their house was set on fire, the Short family received threats of violence and offers from the Chamber of Commerce to buy back the property.

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

Momentum began building to rename Randall Pepper Elementary in the 2023-24 school year. In December 2023, the school dedicated the O'Day Short Family Unity Garden on its campus, and Moss submitted his petition to rename the school to the Board of Education in March 2024.

In addition to Moss and Inbody, Fontana Unified's renaming ceremony included addresses from Board of Education President Adam Perez; City of Fontana Mayor Acquanetta Warren; Senior Director of Marketing, Communication, and Engagement Clarissa Trejo; O'Day Short Elementary Principal Michelle Avila, Ed.D.; and community leaders Dr. Hardy Brown, Carolyn Tillman, and Dr. Daniel Walker – a historian, philanthropist, author, film director, and former Randall Pepper Elementary student.

Among the esteemed dignitaries who attended the event, along with Warren and Perez, were City of Fontana Mayor Pro Tem Peter A. Garcia and Council Members John B. Roberts, Jesse Sandoval, Phillip W. Cothran, and Treasurer Janet Koehler-Brooks; San Bernardino County Board of Education Trustee Laura A. Mancha; Fontana Unified Board of Education Vice President Danielle Holley, Board Members Mary Sandoval, Marcelino "Mars" Serna, and Student Board Member Ashley Suarez; and representatives from Senator Eloise Gómez Reyes; United States Congresswoman Norma Torres; State Assemblymember Robert Garcia; San Bernardino County Supervisor Jesse Armendarez; and San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Ted Alejandre.

"As we rename Randall Pepper Elementary to O'Day Short Elementary School, we honor a family whose story has become a symbol of both pain and progress in Fontana's history," Board President Adam Perez said. "Today, we pause to acknowledge the past and to keep their memory alive. This renaming is more than just a gesture; it is a vow that we will not allow history to be erased and overlooked."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_SCHOOL_RENAMING1: Southridge Tech Middle School student Cyrus Moss, who started a petition to rename Randall Pepper Elementary to O'Day Short Elementary School, delivers a heartfelt speech during Fontana Unified's school renaming ceremony on Aug. 5.

FUSD_SCHOOL_RENAMING2: Fontana Unified Superintendent Miki R. Inbody shares a moving address emphasizing truth, justice, and remembrance as the District formally renamed Randall Pepper Elementary to O'Day Short Elementary School in honor of the Short family's legacy on Aug. 5.

FUSD_SCHOOL_RENAMING3: Fontana Unified hosted a renaming ceremony for O'Day Short Elementary School on Aug. 5, drawing a crowd of community members, including District staff and students, elected officials, and living relatives of the Short family.

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