



Fontana Unified School District

Every Student Successful, Engaging Schools, Empowered Communities

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fontana Unified Kicks Off 2025-26 School Year with New Beginnings, Historic Milestones

FONTANA, CA – Colorful signs, lively music, and cheerful staff welcomed back more than 30,000 Fontana Unified School District students, who greeted each other with smiles, hugs, or fist bumps, for the first day of the 2025-26 school year on Aug. 6.

The first day of the new academic year marks a new chapter for all 44 Fontana Unified schools – many of which have earned recognition, including California Schools to Watch, California Distinguished Schools, and California Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Coalition Awards, among other honors.

It was an especially historic day for two Fontana Unified schools, O'Day Short Elementary and Eric Birch High, as O'Day Short Elementary opened the year under a new name and Eric Birch High at a new location.

Fontana Unified held a historic renaming ceremony on O'Day Short Elementary's campus on Aug. 5. Previously known as Randall Pepper Elementary, the school was renamed to honor the legacy of the O'Day Short family, which is remembered for breaking Fontana's color barrier nearly 80 years ago.

Eric Birch High School began the school year at a new location – the former Citrus High School campus – following the summer merger of Fontana Unified's two Model Continuation Schools. The move aims to create a unified learning environment that offers expanded access to career technical education pathways, mental health resources, and athletics.

Students and families lined up outside O'Day Short Elementary on Aug. 6, waiting for the gates to open and officially begin the first day under the school's new name. With cameras flashing and emotions running high, students paused for photos and shared heartfelt hugs with their families before stepping into their classrooms to meet their teachers.

The day could not come soon enough for siblings Desiray and Frank'O Gils, who are heading into third and fourth grade at O'Day Short Elementary, respectively. The siblings both colored their hair red – one of O'Day Short Elementary's primary colors – to celebrate the first day of school and show their school spirit and pride.

"They are excited, and I am looking forward to seeing how they expand their horizons this year," said Vanessa Ochoa, mother to Desiray and Frank'O. "I love this school. They have been really helpful, and my son has improved tremendously here."

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At Fontana High (FOHI), maroon and white balloons adorned the school's walkway while cheerleaders stood in formation, shaking their pom-poms and cheering on their fellow students as they entered campus to start the school year under the leadership of new principal Joseph Malatesta.

"I couldn't be more excited for the year ahead, I'm filled with excitement and gratitude to return home to FOHI, surrounded by an incredible team of educators who truly embody what it means to Live Maroon," said Malatesta, who returned to Fontana High after serving as an assistant principal at Summit High in 2024-25. "It's inspiring to see our Steelers back where they belong, and the campus full of energy once again."

Fontana High and O'Day Short Elementary are two of 10 Fontana Unified schools opening the year with new principals, including Live Oak, Mango, Palmetto, and Sierra Lakes elementary schools; Sequoia and Wayne Ruble middle schools; Henry J. Kaiser High School; and the District's new secondary academy that will open to seventh through 12th grade students in 2026-27.

"The first day of school is always a time of excitement and possibility, and this year feels especially significant as we celebrate meaningful milestones and new beginnings across our District," Superintendent Miki R. Inbody said. "Fontana Unified continues to grow with purpose, grounded in our commitment to excellence and to ensuring every student has the support they need to succeed."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_FIRSTDAY1: Two Juniper Elementary School students head in for the first day of the 2025-26 school year in Fontana Unified on Aug. 6.

FUSD_FIRSTDAY2: Fontana High School cheerleaders welcome their fellow students back to campus for the first day of school on Aug. 6.

FUSD_FIRSTDAY3: O'Day Short Elementary School teacher Martha Altamirano, center, greets two of her students on the first day of the 2025-26 school year on Aug. 6.

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