



# 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 High Honored with Golden Bell Award for Transformative, College-Going Culture

**Fontana, CA** – Fontana High School (FOHI) has been recognized with a Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association for its transformative College Application Submit Day (CASD), a celebratory event that honors students as they submit their college applications and has reshaped college readiness at FOHI, across Fontana Unified, and beyond.

This year, FOHI will celebrate both the recognition and its ongoing commitment to student success during its ninth annual CASD on Thursday, Nov. 20, when students actively submit their college applications to qualifying universities. The day features on-the-spot admissions from local universities – including the University of Redlands, Cal Baptist University, University of La Verne, Azusa Pacific University, and direct admission to Cal State University San Bernardino – along with photobooths, “I Applied to College” stickers, college t-shirts, and a family reception. Each year, more than 400 FOHI families participate in the event, with over 2,400 applications submitted in a single day.

“The Golden Bell Award recognizes nearly a decade of hard work and collaboration by our team to open doors for students who might not have seen college as a possibility,” FOHI Principal Joe Malatesta said. “College Application Submit Day has changed our school culture and gives every student the confidence to know they have multiple options and opportunities after they graduate, along with a community to support them on whichever pathway they choose.”

Launched in 2016, CASD was initially an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)-led effort to help students complete college applications with hands-on guidance. The success of that initiative, particularly for first-generation college students, led to its expansion schoolwide and, eventually, Districtwide. Today, each Fontana Unified comprehensive high school hosts its own CASD, inspired by FOHI’s model.

FOHI Assistant Principal Marissa Beitler, who leads the event alongside FOHI’s counseling and AVID teams, said that the day is deeply personal for many.

“This wouldn’t be possible without our stellar counseling team, administrative support, and a whole-school belief in a college-going culture – it truly takes a village,” Beitler said. “From senior English teachers giving their time to help students finish applications and financial aid, to every staff member understanding their role in supporting student success, everyone’s contribution matters, along with a shared commitment to our students’ futures.”

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FOHI's college and career readiness journey begins in eighth grade, when students and families learn about high school expectations, Career Technical Education pathways, and the value of involvement.

From ninth through 11th grade, students review graduation requirements, understand how GPA impacts admissions and financial aid, and meet one-on-one with counselors to set and achieve goals. By their senior year, students create their college application accounts, write personal essays, explore scholarships, and continue meeting with their counselors to track applications and fee waivers, all leading to CASD.

Since 2015, a year before FOHI's first CASD, the program has seen significant impacts, including:

- **College acceptance rates** rising from 70% to 95%
- **A-G completion rates** climbing from 30% to 75%
- **FAFSA and Dream Act completion rates** increasing from 70% to 90%
- **Graduation rates** growing from 90% to 95%

"The success of our students come from a schoolwide commitment, even before they come to FOHI as freshman," Beitler said. "CASD is one huge day when all those years of preparation becomes celebration."

The initiative's reach now extends to other local districts, including Redlands, Colton Joint, and Upland unified school districts, who have implemented their own versions of CASD after visiting FOHI to learn from its model.

This is Fontana Unified's seventh Golden Bell Award, which promotes excellence in education and school board governance by recognizing outstanding school programs throughout California. The District will be honored at CSBA's 2025 Education Conference and Trade Show, to be held Dec. 3-5 in Sacramento.

"College Application Submit Day is more than just one day of celebration honoring our students – it represents their hard work and dedication alongside our teachers and staff from the moment they step onto our campuses," Fontana Unified Superintendent Miki Inbody said. "This program embodies our District's belief that every student deserves access to the support, guidance, and encouragement needed to pursue their passions and reach their goals."

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS**

**FUSD\_GOLDENBELL1:** Fontana High School has been recognized with a Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association for its transformative College Application Submit Day (CASD), a celebratory event that honors students as they take the next step toward their futures by submitting college applications.

**FUSD\_GOLDENBELL2:** Fontana High counselors provide one-on-one support to help students complete their college applications and explore tuition assistance options, including financial aid, grants, and scholarships.

**FUSD\_GOLDENBELL3:** Fontana High students craft their personal college essays during English classes, preparing thoughtful statements that showcase their goals and achievements.

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