

El Monte Union High School District

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 11, 2026 CONTACT: Maria Hernandez PHONE: (909) 447-2406

El Monte Union Cheerleading Team Claims 2026 NCA National Championship

EL MONTE – El Monte High School's (EMHS) varsity cheerleading team captured the 2026 National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) High School National Championship during a competition held Jan. 23–24 in Fort Worth, Texas, earning the first national title in the District's and program's history.

The Lions claimed the championship in the Advanced Non-Tumbling Coed Varsity Crowd Leading division, becoming the only California school to compete in the category and just the third California team to claim an NCA national title in the organization's 75-year history. Teams from across the country competed at the national event.

“There were so many emotions when they announced our school’s name,” EMHS senior and cheer team captain Jessal Trejo said. “At first, I was in shock, then I felt an overwhelming sense of pride for myself, my teammates, and our coaches, knowing how much it took for us to work together and push one another to earn this title. I’ve been cheering since I was four years old, and bringing home one of the highest honors in cheerleading — especially growing up in California and representing our school — shows that no matter where you come from, you can pave your own path and become a champion.”

Despite challenging weather conditions, including high winds and three to four inches of snow, the team remained focused leading up to its performance, completing a full warm-up before taking the mat. El Monte delivered a high-energy, two-minute, 30-second routine that emphasized school spirit, sharp stunting, and precise timing. The performance opened with a crowd-focused cheer highlighting the school’s colors and mascot before transitioning into music featuring jumps, elite stunts, pyramids, dance sequences, and tosses, each scored separately by a six-judge panel.

“Since the summer, we conditioned with our coaches to make sure we were physically and mentally prepared,” Trejo said. “In the end it was all worth it because that hard work allowed us to have faith in our team and coaches when we felt tired or at our limits and I think that’s what really carried us through.”

As national champions, the Lions were awarded the NCA megaphone trophy, a championship banner to display on campus, and NCA letterman jackets, one of the highest honors in competitive cheerleading.

The title marked El Monte’s fifth consecutive appearance at NCA nationals. In previous years, the Lions earned two bronze finishes and placed fourth and fifth, steadily building toward this milestone victory.

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"This championship didn't happen overnight, it's the result of years of growth and trusting the process," said Gabriel Gonzalez, EMHS cheer coach and a 2006 alumnus, who is now in his 17th year with the program. "The standard at NCA rises every year, and this team met it with clean execution, confidence, and joy. They trained hard, took feedback seriously, provided their own ideas, and showed up ready to perform on the biggest stage."

Preparation for nationals required a rigorous, year-round commitment, even in the face of facility challenges. With no off-season in cheerleading, the Lions trained three days a week for three hours at a time, often practicing outdoors due to their gym being unavailable during construction and adjusting sessions based on weather conditions. Their schedule balanced winter competition season, spring stunt season, summer cheer camp, and a fall calendar filled with game days, rallies, and school and community events.

The Lions built momentum throughout the season with strong regional and state performances, including zero-deduction routines by both the varsity and junior varsity teams at the JAMZ State Championship in January — a rare achievement that highlighted the program's consistency and readiness for nationals.

Gonzalez also credited the program's success to strong family support, an active booster community and the unwavering backing of the District and EMHS administration, noting that their encouragement and leadership have helped the cheer program thrive.

"Our parents are truly the backbone of this program," Gonzalez said. "Our booster club travels with us, provides critical assistance to our coaches and athletes, and handles so much behind the scenes. I'm also incredibly grateful for the support of our EMHS administration, including Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Robin Torres, who previously served as principal at our school and believed in my vision for this program. Their support has made EMHS feel like home, and this championship belongs to everyone who helped make it possible."

The Lions will compete next at the JAMZ Nationals on Feb. 20–21 in Las Vegas.

"This national championship is a testament to the hard work, dedication and teamwork of our students and coaches," Superintendent Dr. Edward Zuniga said. "El Monte High School's cheer program has made history, and their achievement reflects not only their skill and commitment but also the support of families, staff, and our entire school community. We couldn't be prouder of our outstanding student-athletes."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

EMUHSD EMHS NCA CHAMPS 1: El Monte High School's cheerleading team celebrates winning the 2026 National Cheerleaders Association High School National Championship during competition held Jan. 23–24, marking a historic first for the school's program.

EMUHSD EMHS NCA CHAMPS 2: El Monte High School's cheerleading team deliver a dynamic, cleanly executed performance to earn a championship title at the 2026 National Cheerleaders Association High School National Championship, held Jan. 23–24.

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