



BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bonita Unified Students Define Success at 20th Annual District Spelling Bee

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE - With nerves buzzing and mental dictionaries ready, Bonita Unified students took center stage for the District's 20th Annual Spelling Bee on Feb. 2, transforming the Bonita Center for the Arts into a high-stakes arena of vocabulary and composure where 56 students battled one by one, ready to spell their way to victory.

The competition unfolded over multiple rounds with the field narrowing word by word. In the end, Ally Abad, a fifth-grader from Gladstone Elementary School, claimed first place, followed by fellow Gladstone fifth-grader Maddox Macias in second, and Shull Elementary fourth-grader Sophia Salvador in third place. The win marked the fourth consecutive time a Gladstone student captured the Bonita Unified School District Spelling Bee title.

In addition to the title, Abad received a cash prize donated by the San Dimas Masonic Lodge, along with a cash prize awarded to the Gladstone's school library. Abad will advance to represent Bonita Unified School District at the Los Angeles County Spelling Bee.

"I feel amazing winning this year's spelling bee," Abad said. "I couldn't have done it without my parents and my spelling bee coach, Mr. Wong."

An avid reader, Abad exceeded her Accelerated Reader (AR) goal this school year and has read more than one million words. Her father, Zernan Abad, described the experience as "a rollercoaster of emotions," noting that the District's emphasis on reading played a key role in preparing her for the bee.

According to Gladstone Elementary spelling bee coach Adrian Wong, preparation went beyond memorizing word lists. Students met twice a week to review spelling patterns, practice challenging words and build confidence through mock spelling bees that simulate the competitive environment.

"You have to prep and practice," Wong said. "You never know what word is coming next, so routines, repetition, and learning how to stay calm all matter."

The District's emphasis on literacy has translated into strong academic outcomes. According to the California School Dashboard, Bonita Unified earned the highest "blue" performance rating in English language arts, outperforming the state standard by 56.7 points. During the 2024–25 school year, 73.51% of students met or exceeded standards in English language arts on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, an increase from 72% the previous year.

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“Our students continue to impress us with their dedication, confidence and love of reading,” Bonita Unified Superintendent Matt Wien said. “Events like the District Spelling Bee celebrate academic excellence while highlighting the important role families and educators play in nurturing strong literacy skills across Bonita Unified.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

BUSD_2026 SPELLING_BEE1: Shull Elementary fourth-grader Sophia Salvador (left), Gladstone Elementary fifth-grader Maddox Macias (center), and Gladstone Elementary fifth-grader Ally Abad (right) celebrate their success at the 20th Annual Bonita Unified School District Spelling Bee.

BUSD_2026 SPELLING_BEE2: Gladstone Elementary fifth-grader Maddox Macias celebrates the start of the 20th annual Bonita Unified School District Spelling Bee, held Feb. 2. Macias finished second in the contest.

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