



BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bonita Unified Elementary School Writes Families into the Story of Learning and Literacy

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE - Wearing golden crowns and gathering among shelves of storybooks, Shull Elementary School families were transported to lands far, far away in January for the first Family Reading Night of the 2026, an event designed to strengthen literacy skills while reinforcing the school's culture of family partnership and academic excellence.

Shull's Family Reading Nights are intended to bring families into the learning process, reinforcing reading as a shared responsibility extending beyond the classroom. By creating opportunities for families to engage with books, educators and one another, the event encourages building literacy habits at home that complement daily instruction at school.

"Family reading nights are about building lasting academic skills together while helping students see reading as something joyful and meaningful," said Dr. Mikara Gallegos, Shull Elementary's reading intervention teacher. "When families are involved and students feel supported, it strengthens their confidence and their connection to learning, so every child continues to grow."

That philosophy came to life as fourth- and fifth-grade student volunteers read aloud to younger classmates, creating a welcoming environment that encouraged participation. The experience highlighted student leadership while giving families a firsthand look at how reading is celebrated on campus.

"I love reading, and reading out loud to little kids just feels fun," fifth-grader Cadence Bethany Ordaz said. "When teachers read to you when you're little, it makes you feel connected. Being around books early is what made me love reading, and now my friends and I love coming to the library together."

Events such as Family Reading Night support a comprehensive literacy framework at Shull, where reading instruction is embedded across grade levels and reinforced through structured intervention and enrichment programs. The school integrates research-based systems to ensure students receive instruction aligned to their individual needs while maintaining high expectations for growth.

The Accelerated Reader (AR) Program provides students with clearly defined reading "star levels" aligned to their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). These levels allow educators to monitor progress, challenge advanced readers and identify students who need additional support. Families remain connected through the Home Connect feature, which notifies parents when quizzes are completed and allows them to track progress through a virtual bookshelf.

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For students requiring targeted support, Shull incorporates the Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS), a research-based K–12 program that strengthens decoding, fluency and comprehension through explicit instruction and mastery-based learning, supporting new and struggling readers, including English learners and students with dyslexia.

Along with the support of a dedicated reading intervention and teaching staffs, these systems have produced measurable results across the District. During the 2024–25 school year, 73.51% of BUSD students met or exceeded standards in English language arts (ELA) on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP), an increase from 72% the previous academic year. At Shull Elementary, 79.42% of students met or exceeded ELA Standards. Shull maintains one of the lowest achievement gaps among Bonita Unified elementary schools, reflecting a sustained focus on literacy as a foundation for all learners.

“These learning opportunities open doors for students,” Vanessa Ordaz, mother of Cadence Bethany Ordaz, said. “Education empowers students to think critically, seek knowledge early and build ideas that carry into higher education and life. Events like this welcome families onto campus and remind us that we are all a team. Shull truly values education, and I attribute my children’s success to Shull Elementary.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

BUAS_FAMILY_READING_NIGHT1: A family reads together in the Shull Elementary School’s first Family Reading Night of 2026, an event designed to strengthen literacy skills while bringing students, parents and staff together through a shared love of reading.

BUSD_FAMILY_READING_NIGHT2: Shull Elementary School principal Dr. Christine Wilson and fourth- and fifth-grade student volunteers showcase books they read aloud to younger students during Family Reading Night, highlighting student leadership and the school’s emphasis on building literacy through connection.

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