



BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bonita Unified Middle Schools Recognized as California Distinguished Schools

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Bonita Unified School District’s two middle schools – Lone Hill and Ramona – have been designated as 2026 California Distinguished Schools by the California Department of Education (CDE) for their efforts to narrow the achievement gap and provide equity in education for every student.

Both Ramona and Lone Hill middle schools, which are among 408 middle and high schools recognized by the CDE this year, have previously earned the Distinguished School designation. The program recognizes schools that are among the highest in the state for academic achievement; successful in closing the achievement gap; or serving rural and Title I communities and demonstrating exceptional outcomes. Eligibility for the honor was determined using metrics from the 2025 California School Dashboard data.

“Receiving this recognition once is a tremendous honor. Being recognized in consecutive cycles – in 2024 and again in 2026 – is truly special,” Ramona Middle School Principal James Ellis said. “We are seeing great progress everywhere on campus, but our focus really has been to get students back in class with their friends and teachers. Kids learn better at school, so reducing chronic absenteeism has been a positive development for all students.”

Ramona Middle School has continued to make significant gains in English language arts (ELA), math, and English learner progress. ELA test scores show more than 75% of Ramona students are performing at or exceeding the standard, while 64% of students are at or exceeding the standard in math, with both metrics well over the state average. English learners (EL) are showing great progress as well, with 81% maintaining or rising one performance level over 2025.

Ellis credits these high scores to the continued focus on ensuring all student groups receive support, including English learners and students with individualized education programs (IEP), providing as much one-to-one support as possible, as well as before- and after-school tutoring.

MORE



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Lone Hill Middle School principal Orlando Beltran is in his first year as the school's top administrator. With the school well above standard in ELA and math, Beltran said he hopes to motivate students to achieve even higher CAASPP scores this year through a contest called Jump the Band, which encourages students who are close to reaching a higher percentile of academic success to work harder, with students jumping to the next level recognized by Beltran and entered into a raffle.

"Sometimes with state testing, the students aren't as motivated because they don't receive grades or class credit. But the testing is so important to their education journey," Beltran said. "With Jump the Band, we want to make the experience more fun and impactful for the student, and help them feel special about what they have achieved."

Lone Hill students scored 51.9 points above the state standard for ELA, and 5.9 points above the state standard for math. English learner progress is even more pronounced, with more than 80% making progress, an increase of 26.5% over the previous year, and nearly 95% of ELs maintaining or progressing one level since 2024.

Both Lone Hill and Ramona also promote a supportive campus culture through a robust offering of extracurriculars, including visual and performing arts, sports, and clubs, as well as the Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) leadership program. WEB empowers eighth-grade students to serve as peer mentors to sixth-graders and ease the transition from elementary school to middle school, fostering a sense of belonging through weekly tutoring sessions, lunch and after-school activities, dances, and spirit weeks.

"At Bonita Unified School District, we are committed to ensuring every student has the support and opportunities needed to discover their purpose and succeed," Superintendent Matt Wien said. "The recognition of both of our middle schools as California Distinguished Schools reflects the dedication of our teachers, staff, and administrators, and their unwavering focus on student achievement. We are proud of the Lone Hill and Ramona school communities for this outstanding accomplishment."

PHOTOS:

BUSD_2026_DISTINGUISHED1: Ramona Middle School has been named a California Distinguished School for the second consecutive time, recognizing the school's strong academic achievement.

BUSD_2026_DISTINGUISHED2: Lone Hill Middle School has been honored as a 2026 California Distinguished School for its efforts to narrow the achievement gap.

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