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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 14, 2026

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Covina-Valley Unified Dual Immersion Programs Open Doors to Lifelong Success

COVINA, CA – Las Palmas Middle School students are developing bilingual, biliteracy, and bicultural skills in the school’s Spanish Dual Immersion program, opening doors to expanded opportunities in higher education and future careers.

The dual immersion journey begins early at Manzanita Elementary School, where students enter the program in transitional kindergarten. By the time they arrive at Las Palmas, students are already multilingual and ready for a more rigorous, in-depth curriculum taught in Spanish. The program continues into Northview High School, where students further refine their skills and ultimately graduate with the Seal of Biliteracy.

“These students are some of our highest achievers,” Las Palmas principal Dr. Roy Umana said. “Their minds are working hard, engaging multiple parts of the brain and thinking in complex ways. They also stand out academically, often taking advanced courses and stepping into leadership roles that elevate the culture of our school.”

At Las Palmas, students in sixth through eighth grade take a dedicated Spanish language class focused on writing, listening, and presentation skills, as well as a history class taught entirely in Spanish. Students also deepen their cultural understanding through hands-on experiences and events, such as creating ofrendas and alebrijes for Día de los Muertos. Field trips to museums, including the Los Angeles Plaza de Cultura y Artes, further allow students to engage with Spanish culture.

“Each unit, project, and experience is designed to fully immerse students in the language and culture,” Spanish teacher Liset Benitez said. “By the time they complete the program, they not only gain valuable skills that give them an advantage in college and careers, but they also demonstrate a level of commitment and perseverance that truly sets them apart.”

Benitez, who previously taught Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish at the high school level, brings a wealth of experience to the program. To prepare students for future success, Benitez administers a mock AP exam for eighth graders modeled after the official assessment. Students who pass the mock exam earn a Middle School Seal of Biliteracy, an early milestone that sets them on track for the high school Seal.

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“These students have been together since TK, so there’s a real sense of family,” Umana said. “As they explore new activities and build connections across our campus, they continue to return to their Spanish classes, where that sense of belonging remains strong. At the same time, they help bring that culture to the broader school community. It’s really an impactful program.”

In addition to the Spanish Dual Immersion program, Covina-Valley Unified also offers a Mandarin Dual Immersion program, beginning at Mesa Elementary, continuing through Sierra Vista Middle School, and eventually expanding to South Hills High School.

“Our dual immersion programs are outstanding examples of the innovative opportunities available to our students,” Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Blackmore said. “By building these essential skills early, we ensure our graduates stand out and can succeed at high levels.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

CVUSD_DUALIMMERSION1: Las Palmas Middle School students are developing bilingual, biliteracy, and bicultural skills in the school’s Spanish Dual Immersion program.

CVUSD_DUALIMMERSION2: Las Palmas Middle School students deepen their cultural understanding through hands-on experiences and projects in the Spanish Dual Immersion program.

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