



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 29, 2026 **CONTACT:** Nancy Yeang **PHONE:** (909) 204-6012

Lynwood Unified Music Program Reaches New Heights with Superior Ratings

LYNWOOD, CA – Lynwood Unified School District’s music programs are reaching new heights, with both Lynwood and Marco Antonio Firebaugh high school bands earning “Superior” ratings at music festival events during the spring semester, a first-time achievement for both programs.

The recent accolades shine a spotlight on the District’s Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) programs and the excitement created by two young and talented music directors who have arrived in Lynwood Unified with a goal of establishing elite programs.

Lynwood High music director Mike Cervantes is now in his third year as the Knights’ leader, while Firebaugh music director Zaid Batarseh is still in his first year helming the Falcons’ music program.

“Zaid and I have already established a great working relationship, and it’s wonderful to see and hear so much great music throughout Lynwood,” Cervantes said. “We both want to prove ourselves and exceed expectations. There is such a strong arts culture at Lynwood Unified, and we are proud to add to it.”

Lynwood High’s wind ensemble received its Superior rating during a Music in the Park performance, held on May 1 at the Universal Studios City Walk. The ensemble won its division and was named the best overall band of the day. After their performance, the Lynwood musicians enjoyed a day at Universal Studios.

Cervantes has steadily built his music program during his time at Lynwood High. In his first year, Cervantes brought the band back into the festival circuit; in his second year, the band debuted its new field show. Cervantes also began reaching out to the middle schools, visiting the campuses to stage elective showcases and having middle school bands join Lynwood High for its winter and spring concerts.

“I want to be able to give our students the opportunity to create memories, to expand their horizons, to be seen and heard and to know they have an amazing future after graduation,” Cervantes said. “I have been blessed with this opportunity to lead and I want to prove myself every year.”

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Firebaugh's wind ensemble received its first "Superior" rating for sight-reading during the Whittier High School music festival in March. To achieve this designation, musicians are given new music on the spot and must learn and perform the music perfectly to receive the rating.

In his first year at Firebaugh, Batarseh has hit the ground running, teaching beginning and intermediate band, Bandstand and marching band. He also guides the school's Mariachi Club, which meets at lunchtime, as well as two afterschool jazz bands and a spring band ensemble that is open to all musicians who wish to join.

Batarseh said his approach is to instill confidence in his students and inspire them to make bold choices, preferring his musicians to make loud mistakes as opposed to not playing with enough intensity or purpose.

"Lynwood Unified is fueling my passion for teaching music," Batarseh said. "I appreciate a challenge. I really just want to give students a chance to express themselves creatively and share their gifts with their classmates and the community."

Batarseh is a graduate of Costa Mesa High School, where he was a member of its esteemed music program, then later returned to teach at the school. Wanting an opportunity to lead his own high school band, Batarseh followed the advice of his friend and came to Firebaugh High.

"Congratulations to our extremely talented music directors and musicians for their hard work and dedication, which are bringing the programs to levels they have never seen before," Superintendent Patrick Gittisriboongul, Ed.D., said. "Lynwood Unified is committed to providing every student the opportunity to showcase their creativity and make an impact in their community."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

LUSD_MUSIC_SUPERIOR1: Firebaugh High School music director Zaid Batarseh is in his first year helming the Falcons' music program, and has led the school's wind ensemble to receive its first "Superior" rating for sight-reading during a Whittier High School music festival in the spring.

LUSD_MUSIC_SUPERIOR2: Lynwood High School music director Mike Cervantes is now in his third year as the Knights' leader, leading the wind ensemble to receive a "Superior" rating during a Music in the Park performance on May 1.

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