



# Fontana Unified School District

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## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Oct. 1, 2026

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## Fontana High's MCJROTC Earns Eighth-Consecutive Naval Honor School Designation

**FONTANA, CA** – Fontana High School's Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (MCJROTC) has been named a Naval Honor School for the eighth consecutive year and the 20th time overall since the program began in 1991, continuing a longstanding tradition of excellence in leadership development and citizenship.

The designation of Naval Honor School is presented by the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Navy to the top 20% of JROTC programs nationwide, recognizing excellence in academics, leadership development, citizenship, community service, and overall program performance. Fontana High's program was ranked first in Region 1, which includes schools throughout the western United States, and second overall in the nation.

The program's next goal is to move from second to first in the nation, earning the coveted Marine Corps Reserve Association Honor Unit Award. Fontana High has earned this distinction four times in the past, most recently in the 2023-24 school year.

"MCJROTC has been a longstanding tradition here at Fontana High, and we have never lowered our standards of excellence," Fontana High Senior Marine Instructor LtCol Denny Meelarp said. "We set high expectations from the very beginning, and our cadets continually live up to those standards. They always put in the work."

MCJROTC is a leadership-based education program centered on developing strong citizens who understand the value of serving their community. A series of elective classes covers military leadership, military history, and various career opportunities while also fulfilling A-G course requirements.

Cadets also have the opportunity to join various competitive groups, including an academic team, a drill team and color guard, a marksmanship team, and the Raiders, where teams of cadets navigate obstacles under physical stress.

"We practice every day, and my cadets even want to practice on days when we don't have school," Meelarp said. "I always tell them, if they're willing to put in the work, then I'll match their effort. That commitment shows when we compete against others, and they see the fruits of their labor at competitions."

The 2025-26 competition season saw strong results for Fontana High's MCJROTC teams. The academic team advanced to the national competition for the first time, placing third overall. The marksmanship

team also secured the Sporter League championship and earned a league Most Valuable Player honor, capping an undefeated postseason run.

Fontana High's MCJROTC program completed the highest number of community service hours of any MCJROTC school nationwide in the 2025-26 school year. Cadets volunteer at events across the community, including Toys for Tots, fundraisers, car shows, and more. Students also volunteer consistently at District events, including providing security at football games and helping with the distribution of supplies at the beginning of the school year.

"A lot of new freshmen in the program come in shy and timid, but by the time they're seniors, they have taken on leadership roles in class and are often teaching each other," Meelarp said. "They also learn to be flexible when things don't go their way and develop a strong work ethic. The most important thing for me is exposing them to lots of different opportunities."

While the purpose of the program is not to enlist students into military service, many students choose to pursue that path, with many earning prestigious ROTC scholarships. One benefit of earning Naval Honor School distinction is that Meelarp can nominate up to six of his seniors for each service academy.

When Meelarp first arrived at Fontana High in 2019, there were 120 cadets in the MCJROTC program. This school year, there are more than 200 students enrolled.

"We have the great luxury of getting incredible support from our school, District, and entire administrative team," Meelarp said. "From our incredible facilities, including our own indoor rifle range on campus, to receiving the necessary supplies, we wouldn't be able to do all this without their support."

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**FUSD\_MCJROTC1:** Fontana High School's Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps was named a Naval Honor School for the eighth consecutive year and the twentieth time overall since the program began in 1991.

**FUSD\_MCJROTC2:** Fontana High's MCJROTC program completed the highest number of community service hours of any MCJROTC school nationwide in the 2025-26 school year.

**FUSD\_MCJROTC3:** MCJROTC cadets can join various competitive teams, including an academic team, a drill team and color guard, a marksmanship team, and the Raiders, where teams of cadets negotiate obstacles under physical stress.

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