



Bellflower Unified School District

Media Release

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Bellflower Middle/High School Recognized as California Democracy School

Award Signifies Strength of School's Civic-Learning Program

BELLFLOWER – Bellflower Middle/High School has earned recognition as a California Democracy School from the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) for creating and institutionalizing a highly effective civic-learning program.

Bellflower Middle/High's program teaches students to frame an inquiry into a public problem or issue, research the issue, engage in dialogue about perspectives on the issue, communicate their conclusions and take direct civic action on those findings.

As part of their studies, students have provided homeless residents with toiletry care bags, urged Bellflower to install better lighting on crosswalks to shield pedestrians at night, studied efforts to adopt a district-based voting system and cleaned up a community park.

Bellflower Unified created the program as part of the three-year [California Democracy School Civic Learning Initiative](#) led by LACOE and funded by a grant from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation. Eleven other high schools in Los Angeles and Orange counties also were selected for the program.

"Bellflower has accomplished something rarely seen in American schools," said Initiative Director Michelle M. Herczog, Ed.D. "They have fully integrated civic learning across every grade level in all social science classrooms. By doing so, civic learning is not seen as an 'add-on' or burden on the curriculum but a way to enhance the teaching of social science to be rigorous, relevant and engaging for students."

The Initiative sought not only to seed civic-learning programs at each school, but also to create models for other schools to replicate.

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Standard of Excellence - Nothing Less

Bellflower Unified School District provides a pathway for all students to attain the expertise and develop skills of academic excellence that will empower them to become lifelong active learners, demonstrate respect for themselves and others in a dynamic, diverse and global society, become responsible, informed, productive, independent and contributing citizens, and perform successfully in their chosen field and in society.



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Bellflower High's program was recognized earlier this spring by California's [Civic Learning Award](#) program, an effort led by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson and state Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye. Bellflower won one of just three Awards of Excellence, recognizing it as a state leader in civic education.

"We are exceedingly proud of our team of educators at Bellflower Middle and High School for going far beyond expectations to craft a truly inspiring experience for all of our students," Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs said. "Our civic-learning program has become one of the highlights of our academic program."

Bellflower High received its California Democracy Award on April 30 at the conclusion of a daylong showcase of civic-learning programs by the 12 partner schools at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley.

Bellflower students staffed three of the showcase's 15 sessions.

First, students led a panel discussion on epidemic diseases, immigration, genocide and civil rights. Next, Bellflower seniors Stephanie Yanez and Natalie Soto presented a documentary on their local city's redistricting efforts and voter turnout. Finally, Bellflower sophomores gave a series of soapbox speeches that included commentary on voting and local politics.

"At Bellflower Unified, all of our educational programs are designed to prepare our students for the challenges that follow K-12 education – in the realms of career and higher education," Board of Education President Dr. Paul Helzer said. "This civic-learning program is part of that preparation, giving our students a grounding for how their education translates into how we handle real-world challenges."

CAPTIONS:

DEMO_1: Bellflower High School seniors Stephanie Yanez and Natalie Soto discuss their project on April 5, during a visit to their school by California Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye. The duo presented a documentary on local redistricting efforts and voter turnout at an April 30 civic-learning showcase at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum.

DEMO_2: California Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye discusses civic-engagement projects with students from Bellflower High School on Tuesday, April 5. Cantil-Sakauye presented the school with an Award of Excellence for its program, the state's highest honor for civic-learning programs.

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