



Bellflower Unified School District

Media Release

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Bellflower 2015 Teacher of the Year Leads Mentoring for Newest Faculty

BELLFLOWER – Bellflower Unified 2015 Teacher of the Year Cathy Fong is what you would call a teacher's teacher – quite literally.

As head of the District's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program, Fong is charged with guiding BUSD's newest classroom leaders during their first two years on the job. She trains a team of mentor teachers, meets regularly with her charges and even substitutes in classrooms to keep up-to-date on the latest tools and techniques.

"Cathy Fong is one of our most extraordinary teachers," said Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs. "She has an innate grasp of the challenges of running a classroom, and ensuring students have the support they need to succeed. She possesses wonderful teaching practices/skills that she is able to pass along and ensure our new teachers receive the support they need as they master these same skills."

Support for new teachers is critical for California public schools, which typically lose more than 10 percent of new teachers after their second year and nearly a quarter by their fourth year.

Fong joined Bellflower Unified in 1997 as an English teacher at Bellflower Middle and High School. Immediately after completing her time as a mentored teacher in the BTSA program, she became a mentor. In 2008, she took over coordination of the program as a teacher on special assignment – and immediately began transforming it.

Fong automated much of the paperwork that dogs similar programs, helped train teachers from area private schools when BUSD hiring slowed during the recession, and constantly seeks ways to streamline the program and boost its focus on practical tools for teachers.

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Bellflower Unified is one of just two California districts to implement a suite of online tools in 2014-15 – other districts didn't go live until this year. Fong also helps arrange access to professional development in the latest instructional techniques for new teachers and ensures their mentors have the tools they need.

"My role is to be the mentor to the mentors," Fong said. "They are the heart and soul of the program. If we develop good mentors, then our new teachers are going to be successful. And when you develop good teachers, then it's the students who benefit. That's where our ultimate focus is."

Fong, who still mentors teachers in the Bellflower High School English Department, said rewards for the job are plentiful.

"I really like to be around the new teachers. They're so excited to be in this occupation," she added. "They are always very generous with their gratitude because they can see how the program helps make them better teachers. That, I think is the greatest reward."

Board of Education President Jerry Cleveland said Fong's efforts resonate across the District.

"In nine years, Cathy has led training for about a third of all of our teachers – on top of the teachers she has personally mentored and the mentor teachers she also trains," Cleveland said. "Her high standards and her passion are reflected in the standard of excellence and passion you find at all of our campuses."

CAPTION: Bellflower Unified Teacher of the Year Cathy Fong

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