



PRESS RELEASE

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Benton Middle School Photography Students Garner Highest Accolades in County Fine Arts Competition

Benton Middle School, a Visual and Performing Arts (V.A.P.A.) magnet campus in La Mirada, recently set a new standard for excellence after students won 27 ribbons for photography in the Los Angeles County Fair America's Kids fine arts competition. The school, a 2015 recipient of the California Gold Ribbon award from the California Department of Education, earned 13 first-place ribbons, 11 second-place ribbons, 2 third-place ribbons and one Sweepstakes award, the highest honor accorded to a LACF contest winner.

Seventh-grader Isabella Eckart won the Sweepstakes ribbon in the TEEN 1 category for her photo titled "Streetlight," which captures a moment with her father and sister in front of her home. The award-winning student works were entered in the competition by Benton Middle School Basic and Intermediate photography teacher Victoria Pflanzner.

"The extraordinary work being exhibited by our students is a tribute to the energy and commitment of our dedicated faculty like Ms. Pflanzner, who brings her expertise into the classroom and continually encourages creative exploration and distinction," said NLMUSD Superintendent Dr. Hasmik Danielian. "It is inspiring to see our student work displayed! Congratulations to our award-winning photographers."

The Benton Visual Arts photography students have consistently fared well in local competitions, such as the City of Norwalk's annual Artastic Festival and the La Mirada Photo Contest. This is the first year Benton students have entered the LACF competition.

In addition to Eckart's Sweepstakes award, two students – eighth-grader Cristian Bautista and seventh-grader Max Espino – were awarded two first-place ribbons apiece, and seventh-grader Chloe Martinez took home a first- and second-place ribbon.

"The work being produced by my students amazes me," said Pflanzer, who worked for 15 years as a professional photographer before becoming an educator. "They exceed my expectations. They are doing work that compares favorably to what you see at college photography exhibits."

Pflanzer's students work with digital cameras and are educated in basic fundamentals of photography, learning how to capture, transfer and share images, and employing technical knowledge to produce exceptional images, studying proper lighting, P.O.V., and composition. They also use software programs like Photoshop to enhance images.

Photography is just one part of Benton's comprehensive Visual Arts curriculum, along with Media Arts and Studio Arts.

"Every student has a hand in the arts," Benton Principal Dr. Michael Gotto said. "Our motto at Benton is to cultivate a culture of creativity. With our outstanding Visual and Performing Arts programs, we are providing extensive opportunities for all of our students."

The full list of Benton Middle School winners:

Sweepstakes: Isabella Eckart; **First Place:** Cristian Bautista, Max Espino, Chloe Martinez, Devon Carter, Karim El-Souki, Amber Hernandez, Jacob Silver Hernandez, Oscar Herrera-Licea, Nathan Michaels, Brianna Miranda and Joseph Sermenio; **Second Place:** Chloe Martinez, Kristyan Avalos, Ben Coronado, Brianna Del Aguila, Izabelle Garcia, Serene Luces, Nathaly Ramos, Brianna Salcedo, Jenaro Torres, Melissa Valverde and Albert Vega; **Third Place:** Aaron Henderson and Kati Morgan.

"Each of our magnet and career pathway campuses stimulate creativity as they prepare students to face the challenges of the future," NLMUSD Board President Jesse Urquidi said. "Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District recognizes the importance of complementing our California State standards with elective classes that inspire our students and expand their ability to collaborate and think critically. My heartfelt congratulations to all the Benton photographers for their terrific work."

Photos:

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District • 12820 Pioneer Blvd. • Norwalk, CA 90650
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NLMUSD Benton Middle School student Isabella Eckart wins Sweepstakes ribbon in LA County Fair America's Kids fine arts competition.

Double winners: Benton students Cristian Bautista and Max Espino (kneeling) win two first place ribbons and Chloe Martinez takes first and second place awards.

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