



Santa Barbara County Education Office

4400 Cathedral Oaks Road, P.O. Box 6307, Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307
(805) 964-4711 • FAX: (805) 967-2234 • Direct Dial: 964-4710 plus extension

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Bill Cirone op ed column

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For information: David J. Lawrence
964-4710, ext. 5282

Los Olivos wins the blue ribbon for excellence

By Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools

It is always a joy to celebrate outstanding educational successes in Santa Barbara County, and particularly wonderful this year to applaud Los Olivos Elementary School — the Spartans — for earning a National Blue Ribbon award from the U.S. Department of Education.

Los Olivos joins 278 other public schools nationwide, along with 50 private schools, to receive this highest honor. The K-8 school, which began serving students in 1890, was nominated for the award by the California Department of Education.

The well-deserved recognition is a tribute to the wrap-around support the school enjoys, and to the teaching staff's focus on professional learning. The rich tradition of excellence at Los Olivos results from the hard work and daily miracles that occur everywhere in the school community.

Congratulations go to the supportive board of trustees, the hard-working PTA members and parents, the wonderful teachers who perform professional heroics in classrooms every day, supportive community leaders, a truly child-oriented community, and the skilled leadership of superintendent/principal Bridget Baublits. Everyone involved deserves to take a bow.

Receiving this award is no small feat, and it centers on academic success. The application for the award stated that the school is a “welcoming, small town community of connected, creative, hardworking learners,” that encourages everyone “to be positive, to be exploratory, to be risk-takers, and to embrace differences. We believe every experience is an opportunity for growth and a path to success.”

The staff is recognized countywide for its dedication to excellence in student learning and high test scores. The campus is the center of the local community, with families using the facilities after school and during weekends, along with several youth sports teams and adult sports groups. Academic and enrichment

programs in the visual and performing arts, music, technology, science, gardening, and foreign language are supported by the Los Olivos Spartan Alliance and the Los Olivos School Foundation.

While art and music instruction have always been a tradition, the school recently added a computer-based foreign language component, provided by the Middlebury Interactive Language program. K-2 students learn French, third through fifth graders study Spanish, and sixth graders study Chinese. Upper grade students can study Spanish, French, German, Chinese, or Latin.

The school also adopted the SPARK Elementary Physical Education Program for K-8 students, and encourages middle school students to take an elective, “Creative Expression,” that demonstrates how creativity — innovation, problem-solving, and thinking outside the box — is an important factor for success. It includes a one-day hands-on internship with a professional in a field of interest.

At this historically high-performing school, teachers receive continued professional development that focuses on improving student achievement.

Parent support is a key factor, and parents are kept current using “Parent Square,” a program that provides daily communications and weekly newsletters. It is clear that parents and community members are the backbone of the school’s success.

These are just some examples of the academic excellence, rigorous instructional methods, and community spirit that are the hallmark of Los Olivos Elementary School. How wonderful that all these efforts resulted in national recognition at the highest level. On behalf of the entire educational community countywide I offer hearty congratulations to all involved. You make us proud.

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