



A Supplement from the...

# Palm Springs Unified School District

Serving Cathedral City, Desert Hot Springs, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage & Thousand Palms

February/March 2017

## Family Engagement Conference Set for March 18 at DHSHS

Palm Springs Unified School District's next Family Engagement Conference on March 18 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Desert Hot Springs High School will feature Parent and Youth Advocate Dr. Lamarr D. Shields, who will give the keynote address.

The goals of the conference are to: increase family and community partnerships, develop a positive working relationship between home and school, promote parents in developing skills that assist their children's education, build relationships and provide resources to meet the needs of parents and create relationships that will reach and assist parents who have language barriers.

Shields, who has appeared on CNN, FOX, ABC, NBC and BET, is a bilingual activist, author, thought leader and Ubuntu teacher who has dedicated his life to inspiring others to pursue a higher, more meaningful purpose. Currently, he is the Senior Director of Education and Innovation at the Cambio Group, an organization focused on cultivating, customizing and advancing the mission and goals for schools, non-profits and other government and non-government agencies through education, arts and advocacy.

Shields uses real life stories that teach and entertain, current research that motivates and practical solutions that empower families and communities to take immediate action towards change.

Following the keynote presentation, Shields will lead a follow-up workshop aimed at empowering parents to become more active partners in their children's educations. The event will also include poetry recitations by PSUSD students and continental breakfast. The event is free, and pre-registration is not required. Free transportation from Cathedral City and Palm Springs and free childcare are also available.

For more information, call (760) 416-1374 or (760) 894-4072 or visit [parentcenterpsusd.weebly.com](http://parentcenterpsusd.weebly.com).

## Desert Springs Named a State 'School to Watch'

The California League of Schools (CLS), State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the California Middle Grades Alliance recently announced that Desert Springs Middle School in Desert Hot Springs is one of the 11 high-performing California middle schools newly designated as a model middle grades school in the 2016-17 Schools to Watch™—Taking Center Stage (STW™—TCS) program.

The 11 schools, along with the 19 schools redesignated this year as Schools to Watch, are recognized for "exceeding challenging goals, narrowing the achievement gap and setting students on a solid path toward high school and future successes." Desert Springs was the only Riverside County school named this year and joins John Glenn Middle School in La Quinta as the only Coachella Valley schools recognized in the programs.

"These are 30 fantastic schools that do such a terrific job of helping students succeed with academics and succeed as they face all the other unique challenges of being in middle school," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. "It's a significant time in a student's life, and they need special teachers, staff, and administration to help them prepare for success in 21st century careers and college. These schools do all of that and more. These outstanding schools serve as role models for middle schools up and down the great state of California."

"This is an exciting award for Desert Springs Middle School," said Principal Kiela Snider. "I am fortunate to be the leader of a school site where everyone is invested in meeting the needs of every child. The hard work of students, parents and staff has yielded quality innovative programs

where success is measured beyond the yearly test score. I am proud of the work that the dedicated teachers of DSMS do daily to continuously improve students' educational experience."

STW™—TCS middle grades schools are high-performing model schools that demonstrate academic excellence and responsiveness to the needs of young adolescents, and social equity. These schools host visitors from California and around the world that are looking to learn practices they can use to improve their middle grades schools and close the achievement gap.

Representatives from CLS presented DSMS with their award at a school-wide assembly last week. The school will also be recognized at the CLS conference in Sacramento later this week and in Washington D.C. in June. To earn this designation, schools must complete an extensive application that is reviewed by middle grades experts. In order to retain the designation, each school is re-evaluated every three years.

After the entire staff completed a self-survey, DSMS Assistant Principal Jessica Miller facilitated the writing of the application with a team of teachers that included Katie West, Olivia Mejorado, Jacque Coble, Alex Kirk and Alex Boozer.

"DSMS was selected for the work they have done in the areas of Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity and Organizational Structure and Processes Aimed at Improvement," said Snider. "The selection committee highlighted the quality of instruction, wrap-around interventions and the extensive social and academic programs offered to all of our students."

## PSUSD Administrators Named Tops in Region



Dr. Anne Kalisek

Two Palm Springs Unified School District administrators have been named Administrators of the Year by Region XIX of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and are now vying for state honors in their respective categories.

Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instructor Dr. Anne Kalisek will receive the region's Marcus Foster Memorial Award for Administrator Excellence, and Rancho Mirage High School Assistant Principal Julio Omier has been named Co-Secondary Administrator of the Year. They will receive their awards at the region's Spring Celebration in Riverside in April.



Julio Omier

Kalisek served as a District Principal from 1993 to 2014 and has held her current post since 2014. She is also an Adjunct Professor at Cal State San Bernardino's Palm Desert Campus. She earned her bachelor's degree in foreign languages and education from Washington State University, her master's in education

administration from Loyola Marymount University and her doctorate in educational leadership from the University of LaVerne.

"Dr. Kalisek embodies all of the key characteristics of an effective administrator," wrote Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services Dr. Mike Swize in his nomination letter. "She promotes the success of all students, she builds strong community partnerships, and she fosters collaboration throughout the District. She is a tireless advocate who is dedicated to making high-quality instructional decisions to positively impact all members of our educational community."

Omier served as an English Language Learner Coordinator and Assistant Principal in Oregon before coming to PSUSD in 2006 as Assistant Principal at Raymond Cree Middle School where he served for eight years. He has been at Rancho Mirage High since 2014 and is the current President of the Palm Springs Leadership Association (PSLA) ACSA charter.

"Mr. Omier is an outstanding instructional leader," wrote Director of Assessment and Data Analysis Dr. Jim Feffer in his nomination application. "Mr. Omier promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision that is shared and supported by the school community."



# District Digest

**PSIFF Student Screening Day:** Over 700 Palm Springs Unified School District high school students recently enjoyed the 10th Annual Palm Springs International Film Festival Student Screening Day at the new Richards Center for the Arts at Palm Springs High. Pictured with PSUSD Arts Coordinator Louisa Castrodale, right, is PSIFF Education Programs Manager Nikki Gordon.



**Top Spellers:** Raymond Cree Middle School 6th grader Alexandra Seward, left, left, took first place in the District's recent 40th Annual Spelling Bee of Champions and represents PSUSD today at the Riverside County Spelling Bee in Moreno Valley. Sunny Sands Elementary 4th grader Francis Jeremy Go, right, was the runner-up. Below are all of the District bee participants.



**Every Student Succeeding:** One student from each of PSUSD's schools was recently honored at the Palm Springs Leadership Association's Every Student Succeeding ceremony at the new Richards Center for the Arts at Palm Springs High School. Desert Learning Academy student Kayla Cooper, above center, pictured with Board of Education President John Gerardi, left, and PSLA President Julio Omier, was chosen by a PSLA subcommittee for nomination to the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Region XIX for consideration for an ACSA scholarship. Below are all of the Every Student Succeeding winners.



**'Grab Your Seat':** It was a near sell-out crowd for the Foundation for the Palm Springs Unified School District's benefit "Grab Your Seat" concert, featuring Post Modern Jukebox at the brand new Richards Center for the Arts at Palm Springs High School. Pictured above are Foundation President Mark Gauthier and Supt. of Schools Sandra Lyon prior to the start of the concert, which launched the Foundation's campaign for naming seats and other sections of the new auditorium to raise funds for PSUSD arts.



**Students 'Interact' with Seniors:** Rancho Mirage High School's Interact Club, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Rancho Mirage, below, recently spread holiday cheer to the residents of the Brookdale Mirage Inn in Rancho Mirage with food, songs, trivia contests and prizes.



**DHSHS JROTC Has New Wheels:** Rancho Mirage resident LtCol Harry Ziegler, USMC (Ret) recently donated a first-class golf cart to the Marine Corps JROTC program at Desert Hot Springs High, which will be used during parades, drill competitions and other events. Palm Desert's "Caddy Shack" refurbished the cart at cost and donated labor for repairs. Showing off the new cart is Senior Marine Instructor First Sergeant Nichelle Webb, USMC (Ret).



**Taking The Oath of Office:** New Board of Education Trustee Madonna Gerrell, left, left, and re-elected Trustee Richard Clapp, bottom left, took their oaths of office for a two-year term at the Board's reorganization meeting in December. Administering the oath is Supt. of Schools Sandra Lyon. Clapp ran unopposed in his Trustee area, and Gerrell won the election against two challengers in her Trustee area.



## PSUSD Board of Education

**John Gerardi**  
*President*

**James Williamson**  
*Clerk*

**Richard Clapp**

**Karen Cornett**

**Madonna Gerrell**

## PSUSD Administration

Sandra Lyon, *Superintendent*

Mauricio Arellano, *Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources*

Brian Murray, Ed.D., *Assistant Superintendent, Business Services*

Mike Swize, Ed. D., *Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services*

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**Adopt-A-Family:** Fifty Cathedral City High classrooms, clubs and office departments collected food and gifts for 38 District needy families for the school's 26th Annual "Adopt-a-Family" holiday program. Families are selected each year by the school's feeder elementary schools. Since its inception in 1991, the program has served over 1,000 families. Business partner, The Home Depot, once again assisted with family deliveries.



## District Names Educators of Year

Palm Springs Unified School District recently named its 2017 Educators of the Year. All are being honored by the Board of Education at meetings this month and were submitted as the District's choices for Riverside



Kimberley Gonzalez



Arlan Anderson



Denise Fenton



Fernando Cabeje



Brenda Gunderson



Amanda Gonzales

County honors in their respective categories.

James Workman Middle School's Administrative Secretary Kimberley Gonzalez is the District's Classified Employee of the Year and was recently named a finalist for Riverside County Classified Employee of the Year. Gonzalez has been at Workman for 14 years. She began her career in education as a supervision aide at Rancho Mirage Elementary and then became an instructional aide and then school secretary at that site.

Katherine Finchy Elementary Principal Arlan Anderson was named Principal of the Year. Anderson has served over 28 years as a school principal and has been at Finchy for the past four years. He came to Palm Springs Unified to serve as Principal at Two Bunch Palms Elementary in 2007. Prior to that he was an elementary principal in San Bernardino City Unified School District.

Two Bunch Palms Elementary Assistant Principal Denise Fenton is PSUSD's Certificated Administrator of the Year. With a total of 24 years in education, Fenton began her teaching career as an elementary teacher at Della Lindley Elementary and also taught at Vista Del Monte Elementary for seven years, where she also served as an instructional coach, reading specialist and administrative designee before moving to Two Bunch Palms as its Assistant Principal in 2012.

PSUSD's Classified Administrator of the Year is Technology Support Team Manager Fernando Cabeje, who joined PSUSD in 2005 as a Technology Specialist II. He was promoted to his current post in 2008. In his position, he works closely with teachers and administrators to ensure that their technology needs are met and is also in charge of the District's teacher computer replacement project, which ensures that all teachers have a computer

system that is up-to-date and capable of meeting needs to ensure instruction is carried out without interruption.

Desert Learning Academy Counselor Brenda Gunderson is the District's Counselor of

the Year. Gunderson began her career in education 34 years ago as a teacher's aide before becoming an English Language Arts and Physical Education teacher. Her counseling career began in 1990 at Desert Springs Middle School where she spent 10 years before moving to the Ramon Academy in 2006 and then the new Desert Learning Academy in 2015.

Amanda Gonzales, an English Learner Teacher on Special Assignment, is PSUSD's Site Support Employee of the Year. Gonzales began her teaching career in 2000 as a first grade teacher at Bubbling Wells Elementary and also taught kindergarten and third grade at Agua Caliente Elementary from 2005 to 2010 before becoming an English Language Learner Teacher Coach at Nellie Coffman Middle School in 2010. She has held her current position since 2011.

### Message from the Superintendent

## PSUSD Seeking Community Input for New LCAP



I hope the start of 2017 has been healthy and happy for all of you. We are currently working on the fourth year of our Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and, once again, are seeking input from staff, students, parents and community members on changes, additions or deletions to our current plan.

As part of the state's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), all districts in California are required to prepare a LCAP, which describes how we intend to meet annual goals for pupils, with specific activities to address state and local priorities identified. This past year, we have been able to provide many additional support programs and services for our students, because we have more

local control of our funding. A list of these programs and services can be found within this year's LCAP posted on our website.

We are proud of our efforts, but we know that there is more we can do. As we prepare our 2017-18 plan, we are asking that as many of our stakeholders as possible weigh in with their feedback and suggestions. Earlier this month, we held two community meetings seeking input. If you were not able to attend one of these meetings, you can still provide your feedback and suggestions by responding to our online survey. The community survey can be found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Y2JC925> (English) or <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YYZ5NVL> (Spanish).

If you visit the home page of our website – [www.psusd.us](http://www.psusd.us) – you will also

find links to our student and staff surveys as well and a copy of our current LCAP and LCAP Infographic in English and Spanish. The deadline for survey response and input is March 03, 2017. The Board of Education will discuss initial actions and outcomes at their Feb. 28 meeting prior to the actual writing of the plan. A Board study session will be held to discuss the proposed 2017-18 plan in April prior to a Board vote in June.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support.

Sandra Lyon  
Superintendent of Schools