

## PSUSD Centralized Enrollment Center Open Through April

Palm Springs Unified School District has opened its centralized enrollment center where parents of incoming kindergarten students or students new to the District can not only enroll their student, but also take care of immunizations, transfer applications, school lunch applications and much more – all under one roof.

Through a partnership with Borrego Health, PSUSD's Student Services Department has set up its Kindergarten Enrollment Center at the Desert Hot Springs Health & Wellness Center at 11750 Cholla Drive. The Center is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays (except April 4) through April 11 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. as well as Saturday, March 16 from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The Assistance League of Palm Springs Desert Area have once again donated backpacks and books for incoming kindergarteners, which can be picked up at the center.

Enrollments are also being accepted at the PSUSD District Administration Center (Student Services entrance) at 150 District Center Drive, Palm Springs, on Saturdays March 30 and April 13 from 9 a.m. to noon.

Incoming kindergarteners are those who will be five years old on or before Sept. 1, 2019. Parents can also enroll their child in Transitional Kindergarten if their child was born between Sept. 2 and Dec. 2, 2014. Required documents for enrollment include: birth certificate, proof of residency (current utility bill), kindergarten physical (dated on or before Feb. 7, 2019) and proof of immunizations. Children with Medi-Cal or cash-paying patients, who have not yet had their physical or immunizations, will be able to get them at the Wellness Center at the time of registration (on Tuesdays and Thursdays). In addition to resources for transportation, school lunches, early childhood education programs and district transfers, parents will also be able to visit information tables for each of Desert Hot Springs' elementary schools.

For more information on kindergarten enrollment, call (760) 412-2542 or e-mail [enrollment@psusd.us](mailto:enrollment@psusd.us).

## Teacher Recruitment Fair Scheduled at District Admin Center March 9

Palm Springs Unified School District will be hosting a Teacher Recruitment Fair for possible openings in the 2019/2020 school year on Saturday, March 9 from 9 a.m. to noon at the District Service Center, 150 District Center Drive, Palm Springs.

The District is seeking applicants in all subject areas who hold a teaching credential or will be eligible for a credential for next school year. Applicants can register at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScXpDhi36E01JkgDHw4v0HFLjESyqdlg6yXIYikBOVvIF-h4EQ/viewform>. On-site interviews will be conducted. Applicants should bring a letter of introduction, resume and three letters of recommendation from within the last year.

A special employment incentive of \$10,000 will be provided to hired math, biology, chemistry, physics and special education teachers.

To apply online, visit [psusd.us](http://psusd.us) and click on employment opportunities. For more information, call (760) 883-2715.

## New Program Stresses Importance of Daily Attendance

Palm Springs Unified School District students missed over 90,000 full days of instruction from Aug. 8 through Dec. 4. According to the recently released California Dashboard, a total of 17 percent of the District's students missed more than 10 percent of the 2017-18 school year.

In an effort to raise awareness of the importance of regular school attendance and reduce the number of chronic absenteeism cases, the District launched the "Attention 2 Attendance" (A2A) program in November.

"The goal is to connect to our parents quickly, so we can remove any barriers our families may be facing in getting their children to school," wrote Supt. of Schools Dr. Sandra Lyon in her blog on the home page of the District's website.

Parents of about 10,200 District students who have been chronically absent (having missed 10 percent or more school days so far this year) recently received a letter from their school principal sharing information about how much school the child has missed and information on the effects of missing so much instructional time. Statistics show that 83 percent of students who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade cannot read at grade level when they get to third grade. These students are four times more likely to drop out of school before graduation. Drop outs are eight times more

likely to be incarcerated than those who graduate high school.

"The issue is critical, and we – as educators and family members – must do something about it," wrote Dr. Lyon.

In addition to the letters that are being sent to parents of students with chronic absences, parents of all students in kindergarten through third grade will also be receiving communication in the mail aimed at educating them about the importance of daily attendance and effects of missing daily instruction. The A2A program also includes an attendance monitoring system that carefully tracks days missed and assures that parents are notified in a timely manner.

"We aren't advocating for children who are sick to come to school and do acknowledge that a medical appointment or family obligation might necessitate a child missing a part of the school day," Dr. Lyon wrote. "At the same time, we know that every hour of instruction is important so if one of those appointments is absolutely necessary, please consider having your student out for just the time required for the appointment rather than the entire day."

For more information on the A2A program, read Dr. Lyon's December blog at [psusd.us](http://psusd.us).

## District Selects Teachers of the Year

Three Palm Springs Unified teachers have been named District Teachers of the Year for 2019-20 and will be in the running for Riverside County Teachers of the Year in the spring.



Kenneth Paxton

Rio Vista Elementary teacher Kenneth Paxton, Cielo Vista Charter middle school teacher Jessica Parent and Mount San Jacinto High teacher Anel Ayon were selected by a committee comprised of the District's three 2018-19 Teachers of the Year, Palm Springs Teachers Association President Herb Claggett and two former PSUSD state Teachers of the Year and one PSUSD state finalist. The committee selected the winners from applications submitted by eligible PSUSD site Teachers of the Year chosen by their peers at their individual schools. Riverside County Teachers of the Year will be announced in May of 2019.



Jessica Parent

Paxton, a speech and language pathologist, has been with PSUSD since 2014 and previously served as a speech and language pathologist in Urbana, Illinois for almost 30 years. He holds a bachelors in speech and hearing science, masters in speech and language pathology and certificate in educational administration from University of Illinois.

Parent, who began her teaching career at Cathedral City High in 2006 joined the Cielo Vista Charter staff in 2015 as a seventh and eighth grade English Language Arts teacher. She is also the school's Student Council advisor. She earned her bachelor's degree in English and Spanish from UC Santa Barbara and teaching credential and masters in teaching from Chapman University and is currently pursuing her masters in educational administration from National University.



Anel Ayon

Ayon began her teaching career at Desert Hot Springs High and currently teaches eleventh and twelfth grade math at Mount San Jacinto, her alma

mater. She holds a bachelor's in math from Cal State San Bernardino and earned her mathematics teaching credential from Brandman University.

In addition to the three District Teachers of the Year, site Teachers of the Year for PSUSD include:

Agua Caliente Elementary School	Sharon Knight
Bella Vista Elementary School	Caryn Ahlefeld
Bubbling Wells Elementary School	Christine Cvijetic
Cabot Yerxa Elementary School	Jennifer Kennedy Lieghey
Cahuilla Elementary School	Griselda Rueda
Cathedral City Elementary School	Michael Paurowski
Cielo Vista Charter (Elementary)	Yesenia Aguilar
Della S. Lindley Elementary School	Norma Flores
Julius Corsini Elementary School	Caitlyn Peterson
Katherine Finchy Elementary School	Allison Collins
Landau Elementary School	Heather Baltz
Rancho Mirage Elementary School	Neil Johnson
Sunny Sands Elementary School	Kurt Schieldge
Two Bunch Palms Elementary School	Griselda Pacheco Lopez
Vista del Monte Elementary School	Scott Powell
Desert Springs Middle School	Rheamia Burns
James Workman Middle School	Bridgette Kennedy
Nellie N. Coffman Middle School	Martin Verdugo
Painted Hills Middle School	Andreea Pascal Jeffries
Raymond Cree Middle School	Shaun Olson
Cathedral City High School	Karilyn Dangleis
Desert Hot Springs High School	Michael Bukraba
Palm Springs High School	Joi Cox
Rancho Mirage High School	Vivian Hernandez
Desert Learning Academy	Stacy Brennan
Early Childhood Education	Olga Leibold-Jones

# District Digest



**First Kindergarteners Experience 'The Juma Project' at Living Desert:** Cabot Yerxa Elementary kindergarteners were the first to experience the new "Juma Project" pilot program between PSUSD and the Living Desert. The program, focused on giraffes, includes the reading of the book "Juma the Giraffe," an art activity centered on giraffes and a visit to the giraffe exhibit at the zoo. The program will expand to five sites next year with the goal to have all PSUSD kindergarten students to have the experience.



**Learning Importance of College Early On:** Cabot Yerxa Elementary's entire student body had the opportunity to hear from nearly 30 community professionals talk about their careers and the importance of going to college at the school's recent College and Career Day. Pictured above a firefighter with Engine 36 shows students some of the equipment used in emergencies.



**Cathedral City Elementary Playground Renamed in Fogelson Honor:** The Cathedral City Elementary playground was recently renamed "The Fogelson Family Playground" in honor of Jerry Fogelson and in memory of his wife, Georgia Fogelson, who brought the Game On! Playworks structured recess program to the Foundation for PSUSD in 2013. The program, which increases physical activity and play while working on social/emotional learning skills needed to reduce bullying, began with two schools (one of which was Cathedral City Elementary) and is now in 12 of the 16 elementary schools. Pictured, from left, bottom, Dr. Lorraine Becker, who introduced the Fogelsons to the Foundation; Foundation President Mark Gauthier and Foundation Director Ellen Goodman. At top, left to right, Board of Education Clerk John Gerardi, Supt. of Schools Dr. Sandra Lyon, Board of Education President Richard Clapp, Jerry Fogelson and Board of Education member Karen Cornett.



**Spelling Bee Champs:** After 15 rounds of competition, Cielo Vista Charter Sixth Grader Luke Jin, second from right, emerged victorious in PSUSD's Bee of Champions. Runner-up was Raymond Cree Middle School 6th grader Adriel De La Cruz, second from left, who misspelled "illicitly." Luke's winning word was "mantis." Luke will represent PSUSD in the Riverside County Spelling Bee on March 19 in Moreno Valley. Adriel is the District's alternate. Also pictured are Board of Education member and Bee Master Madonna Gerrell, and PSUSD Executive Director of Student Learning Mike Walbridge.



**PSA Members Teach Younger Students About Pedestrian Safety:** Students from Desert Hot Springs High School's Public Safety Academy (PSA) were trained by representatives of the Riverside University Health Systems and Desert Care Network about pedestrian safety and then shared their knowledge with third graders at Cabot Yerxa Elementary. The elementary students were led through a "safe city" by PSA students who provided information at each stopping point on the way to school. The youngsters learned about how to navigate railroad crossings, cars backing out of driveways, cross walks and business intersections. Pictured with the PSA students are Desert Regional Medical Center Coordinator of Trauma Injury Prevention Gael Whetstone, left, and Riverside University Health Systems Health Education Assistant Daisy Ramirez, right.



**Taking Oath of Office:** Supt. of Schools Dr. Sandra Lyon, left, administered the oath of office in December to Board of Education members from left, John Gerardi, Timothy Wood and Karen Cornett. Gerardi and Cornett ran unopposed as incumbents, and Wood ran unopposed as a new Board of Trustee member, replacing James Williamson, who did not seek re-election.

#### PSUSD BOARD OF EDUCATION

**Richard Clapp**, President • **John Gerardi**, Clerk  
**Karen Cornett** • **Madonna Gerrell** • **Timothy Wood**

#### PSUSD ADMINISTRATION

Sandra Lyon, Ed.D., *Superintendent*  
 Brian Murray, Ed.D., *Assistant Superintendent, Business Services*  
 Tony Signorelli, Ed.D., *Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources*  
 Mike Swize, Ed.D., *Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services*

This Palm Springs Unified School District report to the community is published bimonthly by the Palm Springs Unified School District.  
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**Great American Book Giveaway:** Cahuilla Elementary students each received three new, age-appropriate books from members of the Palm Springs Noon Rotary Club at the group's Great American Book Giveaway just before the holidays. The club, who adopted Cahuilla several years ago, donates books to Cahuilla students each year for them to keep or share with siblings.



#### **PALM Students Volunteer at District Festival:**

Students from Palm Springs High School's Palm Springs Academy of Learning Medicine (PALM) volunteered their time to help make PSUSD's recent "Recharge, Renew, Refresh" employee health and wellness festival a great success. Pictured from left, with PSHS teacher volunteer Anmarie Economos are, from left, Valeria Sanchez, Natalia Dominguez and Ana Velarde. Missing from photo is PALM volunteers Emily Flores and Evelyn Valverde.



#### **Speaker Inspires Students Through His Life's Experiences:**

The Foundation for the Palm Springs Unified School District's Jerry Argovitz Sports Institute (JASI) recently brought national youth-influencer Roy Juarez, Jr., to Desert Hot Springs and Rancho Mirage High Schools to share his story of how he overcame the obstacles in his life to achieve his dreams including graduating from a four-year university. Juarez, who found himself homeless for several years as a teenager and is now an advocate against youth homelessness who shares a message of hope and perseverance, spoke to the JASI athletes at both schools and also addressed the entire student body at several student assemblies. He spoke to students about them having control over how they allow situations in their life affect them.

# Five PSUSD Staff Members Named District Employees of Year

Five Palm Springs Unified School District staff members were recently named 2019 District Employees of the Year and two were named semi-finalists at the Riverside County level in their respective categories. The winners were chosen by the 2018 Employees of the Year based on nomination letters submitted by PSUSD staff members.

This year's Principal of the Year is Jessica Whiteman, principal at Cathedral City Elementary.

"As an instructional leader and a change agent, Jessica Whiteman has built a school that has a warm, caring environment as well as a place where all children can learn and dream big dreams for their future," wrote PSUSD Principal Coach Marsha Boring in her nomination letter.

Director of Assessment & Data Analysis Dr. Jim Feffer was chosen as the District's Certificated Administrator of the Year and was named as a semi-finalist for Riverside County honors.

"Dr. Feffer has successfully steered the ship of assessment and data analysis by providing valuable professional development to faculty and district support staff," wrote Math Teacher on Special Assignment Tom Bystrzycki in his letter of nomination. "The thing that impresses me the most about Dr. Feffer is the way he is able to tell the true story of the efforts of our teachers and students through the way he gathers the data that shines a light on the effectiveness of our programs."

PSUSD's Classified Administrator of the Year is Mental Health Therapist Dr. Joaquin Galeano. Galeano was also named a semi-finalist for Riverside County.

"Joaquin can make each student feel as if his day was structured around that student, and they leave the appointment with a greater sense of self-worth," wrote Mount San Jacinto High



Employees of Year: from left, Dr. Joaquin Galeano, Paul Martinez, Dr. Jim Feffer, Marisol Guerrero and Jessica Whiteman

Counselor Todd Mathis. "As a staff member, I really appreciate his support and feedback. He is one of the best at balancing his role as a therapist and a colleague."

This year's Counselor of the Year is Raymond Cree Middle School Counselor Marisol Guerrero.

"I believe that Ms. Guerrero's expertise in relationship building, her organizational skills and planning, and her years of successful teaching and counseling experience, along with setting high expectations for herself and all around her, makes her a priceless asset to any professional team," wrote Cree Assistant Principal Shane Hagar in his letter of nomination.

The District's Classified Staff Member of the Year is Paul Martinez, Mail Services/Reprographics technician, who has been with the District for five years and was nominated by the full Purchasing and Risk Management Departments.

"It is not often that you find such a professional employee who assists with the success of your department," wrote Risk Management team members in their nomination letter. "His calm professional demeanor is what makes him approachable when we are under tight deadlines to provide hundreds of copies of our benefit guide books at the drop of a hat."

## Director of Classified Human Resources Named Region Winner



Palm Springs Unified School District's Director of Classified Human Resources has been named a top administrator in the region by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).

LaSonya Pitts was selected as the Classified Administrator of the Year for ACSA's Region XIX, which covers Riverside County. She will receive her award at the organization's Spring

Celebration dinner on May 1 at the Riverside Convention Center.

Pitts, who joined Palm Springs Unified in 2002, previously served as a Personnel Specialist for San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools. She is now vying for state ACSA recognition in the classified administrator category with region nominees from across California. Winners at the state level will be announced later this spring.

Pitts was nominated by members of PSUSD's Leadership Team and forwarded to the region by the Palm Springs Leadership Association (PSLA), ACSA's District charter. PSLA nominees in other

categories from PSUSD included: Principal Coach Marsha Boring, Cabot Yerxa Elementary Principal Amber Gascoigne, Raymond Cree Middle School Principal Bernie Marez, Rancho Mirage High Assistant Principal Julio Omier and Two Bunch Palms Elementary Assistant Principal Denise Fenton.

"La Sonya continues to inspire classified leaders throughout the state of California to celebrate their professions and share best practices as they work to impact student success," wrote PSLA President Joe Scudder in Pitts' regional nomination application.

### MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

#### District to Work With County to Improve Student Outcomes



Last month's edition of *Your District News* was our annual accountability issue which provided our stakeholders with a synopsis of how Palm Springs Unified students are doing academically based on last spring's Smarter Balanced Tests and other outcomes we are measuring to determine progress in priority areas. The new California accountability system focuses on a variety of areas, noting improvement in academics, school culture, and college/career readiness among others.

The California School Dashboard was launched to make these measures clear and accessible to the public. Our Dashboard results were shared in last month's publication and can also be viewed at [www.caschooldashboard.org](http://www.caschooldashboard.org). The Dashboard reports results using color-based performance levels for each student group at a school or district based

on the current status of the measurement and the change from one year to the next. It makes it possible for parents and community members to review the progress being made at local schools in a variety of areas.

As part of the current state accountability structure, districts are identified for support based on their performance levels on the California School Dashboard. Districts are identified for "Differentiated Assistance" if one or more student groups is reported as a Red performance level in two or more state priority areas. For instance, a student group might be reported as Red in mathematics and suspension rate and that would make the district eligible for Differentiated Assistance. As opposed to previous accountability systems that created penalties, the new system

focuses on support. Differentiated Assistance is designed to be a collaborative approach with the County Office of Education to analyze causes for the reported results and develop plans to improve student outcomes.

PSUSD is one of 16 districts in Riverside County eligible for Differentiated Assistance following the December 2018 update of the California School Dashboard. The Dashboard shows performance level combinations that qualify for the support for four PSUSD student groups including: Students with Disabilities, African American students, American Indian students, and Foster Youth. PSUSD will be working collaboratively with Riverside County Office of Education as part of the Differentiated Assistance process to improve outcomes for all students across the District.

The focus will be on helping us build our internal capacity to develop and implement improvement strategies with added guidance and support. The assistance is collaborative in nature, rather than punitive. We look forward to the opportunity to have all of us work together as a District with our colleagues at RCOE to identify causes, resources and possible solutions and then measure the effectiveness of those solutions. Through the process, the goal is to improve student outcomes for all students across the District.

Sincerely,

Sandra Lyon, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools