VISTA DEL MAR ELEMENTARY NAMED CALIFORNIA GOLD RIBBON SCHOOL

SAN CLEMENTE—Vista del Mar Elementary (VDMES) was recently named one of California’s Gold Ribbon Schools for 2016. The California Gold Ribbon Schools Award was created to honor schools while the California Distinguished Schools Program is on hiatus as California transitions to new assessment and accountability systems.

In order to be considered for the Gold Ribbon, a school has to show exceptional progress in implementing California’s rigorous new state standards in English and math. In addition, the institution must offer a program that “includes standards-based activities, projects, strategies, and practices…which can be replicated by other local educational agencies.” In other words, Gold Ribbon schools should serve as exemplary models that other schools can observe and follow.

“Several factors contributed to our success at Vista del Mar Elementary School. The staff is not only talented, but also extremely dedicated to its students and their education,” stated Principal Troy Hunt. “In addition, VDMES parents are strongly committed to supporting their school—over 8,000 volunteer hours are logged by the community each month. The collaborative environment between teachers and families creates a wonderful learning environment for the kids.”

“VDMES has exceptional systems and a focus on technology that allows for 21st Century learning,” stated Capistrano Unified School District Board President Amy Hanacek. “The school implements small group instruction and uses advanced technology at all grade levels. In fact, it created the MAKO (Maximizing Academics, Knowledge, and Opportunity) Program so that it could utilize available technology to increase students’ digital literacy as they learn core standards.”

VDMES also recognizes students’ need for access to modern learning tools and has devoted a great deal of time and money to procuring equipment and developing an integrated plan for its use. In September 2013, the campus had 36 computers for 1,180 students; by September 2015, they had 584 computers (over 1,500% growth). Teachers are carefully trained in order to maximize the potential for this technology and ensure that computers are treated as tools, not toys. In addition to traditional research and word processing capabilities, Vista del Mar uses state of the art software applications to help Students with Disabilities, EL Students, and GATE Students. Technology also allows shy and hesitant students to participate in group discussions and class collaborations, empowering these kids in important ways.
The benefits of the MAKO program are tremendous and positive results are already appearing in quantitative data. On the 2015 Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA), VDMES 5th grade students scored above other 5th grade students in the state by 40%. Perhaps more importantly, 97% of the students at Vista del Mar believe that using this technology enhances their learning.

Vista del Mar is devoted to giving its students the best possible preparation for college and careers in the 21st Century. Congratulations to students, families and guardians, teachers, staff and administration for this great recognition!

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