Press Release
For Immediate Release
February 3, 2017

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CAPISTRANO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANNOUNCES HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO – A surprise visit to Dana Hills High School by CUSD Board President Martha McNicholas, Vice President Gila Jones, Clerk Patricia Holloway, Trustee Amy Hanacek, Superintendent Kirsten Vital and Capistrano Unified Educators Association President Sally White was made to announce Individual Education Program Teacher Rob Harris as this year’s High School Teacher of the Year for the Capistrano Unified School District.

Along with Principal Jason Allemann, the group headed to Mr. Harris’ classroom to share the news with him and his students. "Mr. Harris makes a difference in the lives of our IEP students at Dana Hills High School.” President Martha McNicholas said. “By making sure they are included in everything from drama, music, sports, prom, and fundraising events, he ensures they don't just participate in, but that they really live the high school experience. Rob has fostered such a culture of inclusiveness that there is a waiting list for students to be Best Buddies to his students. Outside of school, the world is his classroom. He guides his students to experience restaurants, public transportation, and working in the real world. When IEP students leave Dana Hills High School, they are as comfortable and confident to enter the next chapter of their lives as any student graduating from these halls.”

Rob Harris has built his 12-year career at Dana Hills High School focused on making sure his students have the confidence and skills to be included, involved and independent. As a STEPS teacher, (Structured Teaching Educating Prepared Students), Rob has fostered a culture of inclusiveness for all students at Dana Hills, creating the highly successful Best Buddies program, which now includes over 100 buddy members and has created lifelong friendships.
His early experience as an Instructional Assistant in the Workability program showed him the importance of really preparing IEP students for life after a K-12 education. He has made it his passion to include Dana Hills IEP students in music, football, basketball, prom and social events and SOCSA performances. He has developed jobs for his students in the local community, leading to a smooth transition into the work world post-high school as students move on to independent living.

"I wanted to work with students in high school to help prepare them for life after high school," Harris said. “I need to provide an unforgettable high school experience that is rich with functional academics, includes community based instruction and independent living skills and opportunities for work experience."

The charm, personalities and great behavior of Rob's students shine in the community and the world is his classroom. He realizes the importance of supporting students regardless of the skills or abilities they may have.

The Best Buddies program at Dana Hills High School pairs students with each other for support in all areas of life. There is so much interest in the program, there is currently a waiting list for high school students interested in becoming a Best Buddy to an IEP student.

Harris will represent CUSD at the Orange County Department of Education Teachers of the Year program where four teachers will be selected to move on to the California Department of Education Teacher of the Year program.

Pictures and video are available on our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/CapoUnified/ or by request.

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