

PAJARO VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District is to educate and to support learners in reaching their highest potential. We prepare students to pursue successful futures and to make positive contributions to the community and global society.

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pajaro Valley Unified School District and Life Lab – a Growing Partnership JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Watsonville, CA - Pajaro Valley Unified School District supports and implements evidence-based, innovative ways to elevate student achievement. Personalized learning is an effective way to ensure students engage in their education, explore their curiosities and find passions and interests. Life Lab, a nonprofit, nationally recognized organization dedicated to creating and sustaining a culture of garden-based learning in schools, has been a PVUSD partner for over a decade and is an excellent example of supporting personalized learning – and this partnership is growing.

Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, Superintendent of Schools at PVUSD, recognizes the value of this partnership and states, “At PVUSD, we believe in providing personalized learning that supports all learners at their point of need. It is important to establish programs that motivate and engage students to learn about themselves and the rich agricultural community around them. PVUSD has seen the significant impact Life Lab has had on students who participate in the program. The garden-centered and hands-on curriculum provides students with a unique and proven way to learn Next Generation Science Standards while positively impacting their social-emotional learning. We are proud to be one of the leading Districts across the nation implementing Garden Classrooms as we expand the program to every elementary school in PVUSD.”

Currently, Life Lab is at seven of our schools and their Garden Instructors impact almost 4,000 students! It is the results and testimonials of students who have participated in the program that encouraged PVUSD to expand access to all 16 elementary school students by the fall of 2024. Instructional content includes high quality engaging lessons and activities that feature PVUSD’s priority content focus areas in Social-emotional Learning, Literacy Tie-Ins, Common Core Language Arts, Food Systems, Nutrition, Healthy Eating, Environmental Science, all of which are in alignment with PVUSD’s Science and Environmental Literacy Plan.

“Our team has been excited to pilot and grow garden-based learning programs with the District, in collaboration with dedicated staff at PVUSD Extended Learning and our partner schools,” noted Life Lab Co-Executive Directors Don

Amesti * Ann Soldo * Bradley * Calabasas * Diamond Technology Institute * Freedom * H.A. Hyde * Hall District * Landmark * MacQuiddy * Mar Vista * Mintie White * Ohlone * Radcliff * Rio Del Mar * Starlight * Valencia * Aptos Jr. High * Cesar E. Chavez * E.A. Hall * Lakeview * Pajaro Middle * Rolling Hills * Aptos High * Pajaro Valley High * Watsonville High * Renaissance High * New School * Alianza Charter *
* Pacific Coast Charter * Watsonville Charter School of the Arts * Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education

Burgett and Judit Camacho. “Seeing the joyful engagement of thousands of students and the positive impacts on their learning, well-being, school pride and more confirms what decades of research have shown - garden classrooms are effective, vital spaces where educators bring learning to life. We know that these spaces are particularly valuable for English language learners and for children with a wide array of learning styles. We are thrilled to scale these opportunities to all of PVUSD’s elementary school students now with one of the most robust partnership program models in the country.”

Camacho added, “As a child of farmworker parents, a parent of Life Lab summer camp participants, and a 20-year advocate for the advancement of underserved communities in science, I am deeply grateful that Pajaro Valley students will have these joyful and healing learning environments that they deserve.”

PVUSD is proud to invest in a program proven to align with our vision, with our goals and with our core values. Together with Life Lab and the continued generosity of our community, PVUSD expects year-over-year sustainability and continued benefit to the students we serve.

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For further information or to interview Dr. Rodriguez directly, please contact PVUSD Public Information Officer Alicia Jimenez via the contact information above.

For further information or to interview Mr. Burgett and Ms. Camacho directly, please contact Life Lab Communications & Impact Specialist Manny Romero via the contact information above.

About Pajaro Valley Unified School District: Pajaro Valley Unified School District is dedicated to creating educational equity for students, families and communities we serve. PVUSD serves almost 20,000 students: 82% are Latino, 16% are White, 65% are English Language learners, and 85% qualify for free or reduced lunch programs. The district has sixteen elementary schools, six middle/junior high schools, three comprehensive high schools, nine charter/alternative schools and one Virtual Academy. The 2,470 Administration, Classified and Certificated staff members are dedicated to ensuring that all of our students can reach their greatness. At the center of our Target for Student Success is the belief that our students must leave our schools college, career and life ready. Visit us at www.pvUSD.net.

About Life Lab: Life Lab cultivates children's love of learning, healthy food, and nature through garden-based education. Founded at Green Acres Elementary School in Live Oak in 1979, Life Lab now serves more than 6,000 elementary students in Santa Cruz County through partner schools programs, field trips to garden classrooms on two farms, and summer camps. Life Lab is also a national leader in garden-based science, nutrition and environmental education, providing curriculum, educator training, and program consulting that positively impacts the lives of more than 500,000 students across the U.S. each year. Life Lab co-founded the national School Garden Support Organization (SGSO) Network of over 2,000 members, hosts an annual national SGSO Leadership Institute in Santa Cruz, and will co-host the first national Growing School Gardens Summit in Denver, CO, in April 2022. Visit us at www.LifeLab.org.

Photos and Captions (image files available from Life Lab, manny@lifelab.org)



Life Lab Partner Schools Program Leader Aisling Mitchell and Amesti Elementary School second graders imagine how seeds they are examining travel and why they think that in a *Next Generation Science in the Garden* lesson on seed dispersal. (Fall 2019, Life Lab)



Hall District Elementary School students digging into healthy fresh produce in a garden-based nutrition education lesson. (Fall 2017, Life Lab)



T.S. MacQuiddy Elementary School students engage in a pollinator drawing activity. (Spring 2019, Life Lab)