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## **Bonita Unified Students Develop Skills, Friendship Through Big Brothers Big Sisters Program**

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – Bonita Unified elementary school students are discovering the joys of having a high school mentor and best buddy through a new career technical education (CTE) partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Los Angeles, which provides mentoring specialists to lead programs for Grace Miller Elementary and La Verne Heights Elementary students who desire afterschool companionship.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) pairs older students, known as “Bigs,” with younger students, known as “Littles.” The Bigs consist of Bonita High School volunteer mentors who meet once a week at the elementary school campuses to spend time with their Littles. The program, which debuted in October 2023, will run for the rest of the 2023-24 school year.

“Big Brothers Big Sisters is an ideal program for students who might want a role model or who are the only child in their family,” Grace Miller Elementary School counselor Ruby Olacio said. “The Littles are very grateful for this program, and enjoy making the connections with their Bigs. And the Bigs really love being here. It’s important to have that one major connection in your life that will impact your confidence and social awareness.”

On a recent Wednesday afternoon at Grace Miller, the one-hour afterschool session began with Bigs chatting with their Littles about school and home life, telling stories and catching up. BBBS mentor specialist Maria Garcia then led them through an exercise about self-esteem and positivity.

After completing the exercise, Bigs and Littles went outside to toss flying discs, jump rope, play tag and engage in a spirited game of Red Light, Green Light. Other BBBS activities include playing board games, making slime and working on homework.

Grace Miller fifth-grader Junia Wolford joined the program because she liked the idea of having an older sister. Wolford, whose favorite subject is English, said she gives the BBBS program two thumbs up.

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“It’s really fun to be in Big Brothers Big Sisters. There are so many fun activities, and having someone older than you to share in the fun makes it even better,” Wolford said. “In my family, I’m the older sister. My big sister at school is teaching me things I can pass on to my younger sister.”

Bonita High School sophomore Meredith Macasa joined the program because she is interested in working with younger students. Macasa is considering a career in the medical field and wants to work with people.

“Big Brothers Big Sisters is a really fun and rewarding experience,” Macasa said. “My Little is really shy, and it’s a great feeling to be able to help her become more social with her peers. It can get very chaotic, but it’s both educational and a really good time.”

Potential BBBS participants fill out applications and submit them to their respective schools. At Grace Miller, Olacio and staff interview students and their parents. More than two dozen Grace Miller students make up the school’s first group of Littles.

The selection process for Bonita High School students mentoring at Grace Miller is more rigorous. Future Bigs fill out applications and are then interviewed by Bonita High staff as well as mentoring specialist Garcia. If their personality and demeanor are deemed a good match for a Grace Miller Little, they are brought into the program.

“The Big Brothers Big Sisters has brought a lot of joy and happiness to our campuses. It’s amazing how far kindness and friendship can go in helping shape the lives of both our high school and elementary school students,” BUSD CTE coordinator Vanessa Tilford said. “Our parents are thrilled that their children are able to spend quality time with older students they consider role models.”

### PHOTOS:

**BUSD\_BBBS1:** Bonita High School sophomore Meredith Macasa enjoys a piggy-back ride with Grace Miller Elementary School fifth-grader Riley Deal as part of Bonita Unified’s Big Brothers Big Sisters afterschool program. Big Brothers Big Sisters matches elementary school students looking for companionship with high school mentors, who come once a week after school to chat, play games and serve as role models.

**BUSD\_BBBS2:** Grace Miller Elementary School “Littles” enjoy time with Bonita High School “Bigs” as part of the District’s Big Brothers Big Sisters program, which is also available at La Verne Heights Elementary School. Meeting once a week after school, the students bond with each other by chatting about home life and school, playing games and doing homework.

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