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## **Bonita Unified Elementary Recognized as Autism Spectrum Disorder CAPTAIN Demonstration Site**

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – Students at Gladstone Elementary School’s annual “Be You” Family Night in April could not get enough of the therapy dogs, with children and parents feeling the love from their furry friends, while others sparked new connections at the petting zoo. Now in its second year, “Be You” is a night where the entire school comes together to celebrate individuality.

Gladstone Elementary has long served students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and their families, offering a full range of support services that promote inclusion and communication, and provide a nurturing education environment.

Gladstone Elementary not only enrolls students from within Bonita Unified, but also hosts students throughout the East San Gabriel Valley Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). For its efforts in providing these services to the community, Gladstone was recently designated as a California Autism Professional Training and Information Network (CAPTAIN) demonstration school.

“Gladstone serves students from all over the East San Gabriel SELPA area, including Claremont, Azusa, Baldwin Park, Charter Oak and beyond,” Gladstone school psychologist Dr. Angela Davis said. “Being designated as a CAPTAIN school is an honor, and reflects the schoolwide commitment to providing students with autism with a sense of belonging and a level playing field to become lifelong learners.”

SELPA CAPTAIN school sites develop exemplary programs that can serve as demonstration sites for other programs across the area. Gladstone hosts four autism provider programs and classes and has a full complement of professionals to support its classroom teachers and paraprofessionals, including a psychologist, program specialist, occupational therapist, speech therapist and adaptive physical education specialist.

“Gladstone’s partnership with its general education teachers, the PTA, and leadership teams has created a campus where all students and families are valued for their abilities, rather than being labeled for their deficits,” ESGV SELPA Program Administrator Jennifer Wolfe said. “We are grateful for our partnership and thank the Gladstone team for all of their hard work and dedication.”

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# BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Gladstone's four classes are equally divided between grades K-2 and grades 3-5 and ASD (mild to moderate) and ASDI (intermediate to severe) pupils, accommodating students whose emotional needs are handled with care and understanding, providing instruction and support to navigate social experiences with the goal of promoting inclusion and overall wellbeing of its students.

SELPA CAPTAIN sites advocate the development and use of evidence-based practices (EBP) such as social skills training, visual modeling, task analysis, sensory integration, and a focus on executive functioning skills. EBPs gauge the effectiveness of strategies which allow practitioners to make informed decisions on care and provide educators the opportunity to support autistic students.

Teachers at Gladstone use a variety of visual supports that help to strengthen students' ability to understand and navigate the school environment with independence.

"Gladstone has an extraordinary faculty and staff who have fully embraced the program, and everyone really works together beautifully," BUSD Senior Director of Specialized Services Danielle Walker said. "We are proud to host a CAPTAIN demonstration school at Bonita Unified, and welcome school districts from all over Southern California to come learn about autism best practices."

Gladstone's autism teachers include ASD (K-2) teacher Kristina Cardeno, ASD (3-5) teacher Ashley Lujano, ASDI (K-2) teacher Ashley Bugarin and grades ASDI (3-5) teacher Irma Guerrero. Guerrero was recently named Gladstone's 2023-24 Teacher of the Year.

"Irma is wonderful. She sees the strengths in her students, understands them and has a great rapport in the classroom," Davis said. "Our families love Irma, and see the growth and empowerment in their child develop over the three years they are in Irma's classroom. Irma's recognition is an example of how Gladstone Elementary values her dedication to her students, classroom staff, and families."

### PHOTOS:

**BUSD\_CAPTAIN1:** A Gladstone Elementary School student receives support in class during a lesson. Gladstone was recently named an East San Gabriel Valley SELPA CAPTAIN demonstration site for its work in developing exemplary programs for children with autism and other neurological conditions.

**BUSD\_CAPTAIN2:** A Gladstone Elementary student in special education teacher Kristina Cardeno's class is all smiles as he completes an assignment.

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