



PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SIERRA SANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED AS 2025–2026 CAPTURING KIDS’ HEARTS® NATIONAL SHOWCASE SCHOOLS

Ridgecrest, CA — Three schools within the **Sierra Sands Unified School District** have been named **2025–2026 Capturing Kids’ Hearts® National Showcase Schools**, a national distinction recognizing campuses that demonstrate exceptional commitment to building positive culture, strong relationships, and connected school communities.

The honorees include:

- **Faller Elementary School**
- **Gateway Elementary School**
- **Las Flores Elementary School (second year in a row)**

The Capturing Kids’ Hearts National Showcase Schools® (NSS) Award is given to campuses that exemplify trust-building practices, intentional connections between students and staff, and leadership focused on student success and well-being.

“This recognition affirms what we see every day on our campuses—educators who lead with heart, intention, and a deep commitment to their students,” said **Superintendent, Dr. Apri Moore**. “We are incredibly proud of the teams at Faller, Gateway, and Las Flores for creating environments where students feel safe, valued, and inspired to learn.”

Campus Leadership Reflections

Principals from the honored schools emphasized that the award reflects collective effort and shared purpose.

“This award belongs to every teacher, staff member, student, and family who contributes to the relationships that define our school,” said Principal Jennifer Brown of Faller Elementary School. “We are intentional about how we connect with one another, and this recognition reflects the power of putting people first. Our students and staff have been working incredibly hard to make meaningful changes that ensure our campus remains focused on building strong, positive relationships.”

“Capturing Kids’ Hearts has helped us create a culture where students know they matter,” said Principal Shelley MacKenzie of Gateway Elementary School. “Being recognized as a National Showcase School is a celebration of the trust and teamwork lived out on our campus each day.”

“This honor highlights the heart of our school community,” added Principal Sarah Tate of Las Flores Elementary School. “Our staff works tirelessly to ensure every child feels welcomed, supported, and empowered to succeed.”

Board Leadership Perspective

Robert Campbell, President of the **Sierra Sands Unified School District Board of Education**, praised the schools’ commitment to culture and connection.

“Academic success begins with strong relationships,” Campbell said. “These campuses exemplify what it looks like when adults lead with care and consistency. This recognition is well-deserved and reflects the values our district stands for.”

Student Voice at the Board Table

Student board member **Jasmine Casas Flores**, a military-connected student herself, shared the significance of this recognition from a student perspective.

“As a military child, having a school where you feel seen and welcomed makes a huge difference,” said Casas Flores. “Schools that focus on connection help students like me feel grounded, even when life brings a lot of change. I’m proud our district is being recognized for creating schools where students truly belong.”

About Capturing Kids’ Hearts

Capturing Kids’ Hearts is a professional development organization that equips educators with strategies to build strong relationships and positive school cultures. The National Showcase Schools® Award recognizes campuses that demonstrate excellence in implementing these practices with fidelity and heart.