

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Reading Pals & Chico Unified Receive Award At Annual Education Conference

Celebrating outstanding education programs and governance practices.

Chico, CA –The Reading Pals Program and Chico Unified School District were selected as one of 60 recipients of California’s leading educational honor, the Golden Bell Award. The Golden Bell Awards, celebrating their 44th year, are presented by the California School Boards Association to promote excellence in public education and school board governance by recognizing outstanding programs and governance practices. The awards reflect the depth and breadth of education programs and governance decisions supporting these programs that are necessary to address students’ changing needs.

Chico Unified School District and Reading Pals received its award at a well-attended reception and ceremony on Nov. 30, 2023, at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square. The awards ceremony was part of the California School Board Association’s (CSBA) Annual Education Conference and Trade Show held from Nov. 30-Dec. 2 in San Francisco. The conference is the premier continuing education event for California school board members and the largest education leadership conference in the state.

Reading Pals Chico intertwines literary comprehension with community compassion by pairing volunteers with struggling readers. The premise is simple: one student, one volunteer, one hour a week. Since its inception, 1,300 Reading Pals volunteers have positively impacted 2,600 students. This community-driven program has provided over 67,000 hours of individualized mentorship, bolstering reading confidence and life-long learning skills. While literacy gains demonstrate the program’s success, the real magic lies in the connections that continue far beyond classroom doors.

“This recognition is much more than an award; it’s a celebration of the strong community partnership and volunteer contributions to our students,” stated Superintendent Kelly Staley. “The program Founders, Michelle Curran and Rory Rottschalk, are inspiring students and igniting the love of reading!”

A judging panel composed of experts from school districts and county offices of education across the state reviewed written entries and made initial recommendations. On-site validators then reviewed the recommendations and assessed the programs in action. This year’s Golden

Bell winners demonstrated that they are addressing student needs through areas such as equity and access, school climate and safety, technology, and wellness.

“As we wrestle with the aftermath of the pandemic and address longstanding issues related to student success, it’s important to highlight school districts and county offices of education that are demonstrate promising practices for closing opportunity and achievement gaps and supporting student wellness,” said CSBA CEO & Executive Director Vernon M. Billy. “This year’s Golden Bell winners have developed remarkable programs that can serve as an example for schools across the state as they work to accelerate learning recovery and foster healthy school environments for all California students.

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CSBA is a nonprofit education association representing the elected officials who govern public school districts and county offices of education. With a membership of nearly 1,000 educational agencies statewide, CSBA brings together school governing boards and district and county office administrators to advocate for effective policies that advance the education and well-being of the state’s more than 6 million school-age children. Learn more at www.csba.org.