

# CJUSD *Newsletter*

## Upcoming events/ reminders

Regular Board Meeting  
February 8, 2023  
6 PM - Board Room

**NO SCHOOL**  
February 13: Lincoln's  
Birthday  
February 20: President's Day

## *Responding to Students*

In the previous issue of the District Newsletter, it was noted that research shows that students who receive mental and behavioral health support as well as social-emotional support not only achieve better academic results, but also positively impacts the school climate, classroom behavior, student engagement in learning and students' sense of connectedness and well-being. It is vital that we provide the support students need academically, behaviorally and social-emotionally to achieve their greatest growth.

Left unsupported, mental health concerns can lead to higher rates of student drop-outs, delinquency and interfere with the development of positive relationships with others. For these reasons, it is important for the District to provide a comprehensive and multi-level approach to mental health services. A description of the mental health and behavioral support services as well as an introduction of the people providing the first level of services was provided to the community in the previous district newsletter. While the first level of support is critical, there are additional layers of support available for students who require more intensive support and that build upon the services provided by our counselors.

CJUSD students are supported by three School Psychologists and two Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs). These staff members are experts in their field and provide more intensive support when needed. Their expertise assists with identifying needs and determining specific strategies and interventions to meet those needs. In this issue, you will become more familiar with this outstanding team and how they help support our students, families and the school community.



# CJUSD

## School Psychologist

*Alyssa Reyes*



**What is your work history, including your current position with CJUSD?**

This is my first year as a School Psychologist in CJUSD at Corcoran High School. I have had the opportunity to work with all grade levels and in both general and special education settings. Before working at CJUSD, I worked as an After School Teacher, Substitute Teacher, and Instructional Aide for the Behavior Zone at Shelly Baird.

**What is most rewarding to you when working with students and/or in your position?**

The most rewarding part of working with students is building rapport with them and having the opportunity to see them succeed and grow as individuals.

**What special project(s) are you working on with the students or staff in your position?**

We are working on a streamlined approach that will help us better serve our students in all grade levels more comprehensively.

**Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life?**

The biggest inspiration in my life has been my family. My parents, husband, and children all continued to inspire, motivate, and encourage

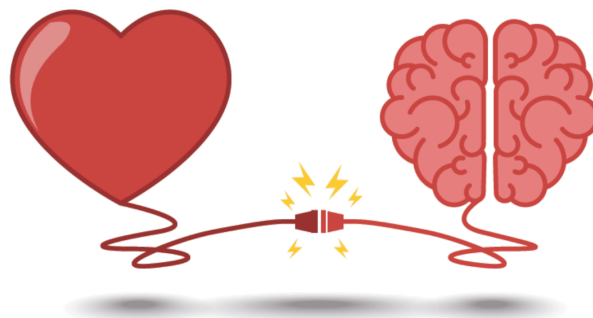
me to believe in myself. Because of their support, I can serve this community as a School Psychologist.

**Tell us a little about yourself:**

I grew up in Laton, California, and currently live there with my two children and husband. I attended school at UMassGlobal (formerly known as Brandman) and graduated with my Master's degree in Educational Specialist in School Psychology. In my free time, I enjoy spending time with my family and friends and taking trips to Disneyland.

**What is a good mental health message you would like to give to students, staff, and or parents?**

A message that I would like to give is to take care of yourself first. Self-care is the most important thing you can do for yourself. Take care of yourself first; then, you can take care of others.



## ***Rachel Kreifels***

### **What is your work history, including your current position with CJUSD?**

I have eight years of experience as a school psychologist and nine years of experience in applied behavior analysis. I have worked as an in-home service provider as a behavior specialist and in Sanger Unified, Clovis Unified, Laton Joint Unified, and Corcoran Unified as a school psychologist and behavior specialist.

### **What is most rewarding to you when working with students and/or in your position?**

I truly love psychoeducational assessment and being able to discern whether a disability is impairing a student, discover the why, and then refer them for services that will best meet their needs. I especially love working with very young children. It is rewarding to identify disabling conditions early and set children up with the services they need to help them succeed. Additionally, I really enjoy functional behavior analysis and helping to shape behavior and make learning more accessible to children with difficulties.

### **Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life?**

My dad has been the biggest inspiration in my life because he puts God first in all he does. Because he does that, he works with people peacefully, with grace, kindness, and acceptance. He is a blessing to all who know him. I strive to view and treat people as he does.

### **Tell us a little about yourself:**

I have been married for eight years and have two little boys, 3 and 6 years old. I played water polo in high school and college. After college, I was offered a paid professional water polo position in Australia, but I chose to seek my professional in school psychology and behavior analysis instead. Family is always first, but I am truly passionate about what I do and love my job at Corcoran very much.

### **What is a good mental health message you would like to give to students, staff, and or parents?**

The needs of people are individual and unique. Each person deserves for others to see them as they indeed are, be loved and accepted. Children with mental health difficulties can be challenging to help in the educational setting. However, they did not wake up and decided to struggle this way. They need love and acceptance more than we can even grasp. They are ours, and we must love them and serve them. I do not take my job lightly.





## *Natashia Lopez*



**What is your work history, including your current position with CJUSD?** For many years I worked for the Tule River Indian Reservation within their Education Department. I helped coordinate programs for the tribal youth members and assisted in their academic areas. I later worked for Tulare City School District while completing my internship. Here is where I gained experience within the Special Day Classes and the required areas of school psychology. After graduating and obtaining a Master's Degree in Educational Specialists in School Psychology with a PPSP, I was hired by CJUSD. I am currently assigned to the John Muir campus and the SDC students at Mark Twain. As school psychologists, we primarily conduct evaluations, write psycho-educational reports, and collaborate with other service providers.

**What is most rewarding to you when working with students and/or in your position?** Some of the rewarding aspects of working with students are: assisting in identifying the type of learner they are. In

doing so, we can offer support in the areas in which the student isn't as strong. This helps the teacher and can really restore a student's confidence in their abilities. Another is collaborating with teachers and other support professionals when addressing the diverse learning needs of the students in our district. I'm fortunate to have joined a great Special Services team that all want to work hard to help our students succeed and work diligently to do so.

**What special project(s) are you working on with the students or staff in your position?** Something the SPED Department is working towards is streamlining many of our services. The current school psychologists and SPED Director know the importance of addressing concerns and delivering our services in a unified format. During a building year, it's critically important to establish this, so we can better fulfill our commitments. When an allocation of support services is done right, we will put forth our best efforts for our students and community.

**Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life?** My father. He's taught me lessons for a lifetime and set a tremendous example of someone who I would be proud to emulate. He was a dedicated family man who maintained those responsibilities while having a strong presence in our community, volunteering, commissioning a sports league, and serving many years on our local school board. He showed me that helping others will always create a natural sense of accomplishment and a sense of pride.

**Tell us a little about yourself:** I was born and raised in the Central Valley of California, so naturally, many of my favorite pastimes and places to visit are here! I love taking in a Giants baseball game, the excitement of attending a Lakers game or visiting the Happiest Place on Earth. I love to admire our mountains on a Sunday drive with my boyfriend and our Belgian Malinois, Cairo. I also value the time that allows me to stop and relax and take time for myself.

**What is a good mental health message you would like to give to students, staff, and or parents?** "Just because no one else can heal or do your inner work for you doesn't mean you can, should, or need to do it alone." – Lisa Olivera I think it's important that others are reminded, or in the student's case, taught that it's important to reach out to others in a time of need. Many strive to do things independently or choose not to be vocal, but there is strength in finding solace in others.



# CJUSD

## Marriage and Family Therapists

***Melinda Ashford-Leonardo (Mindy)***

**What is your work history, including your current position with CJUSD?**

My work history started as a Preschool teacher in Huron, Ca. I continued to work as a Preschool teacher in Avenal and Corcoran for the KCAO Head Start Program as a Teacher Director for nine years. I worked for KCAO in various capacities for 18 years. I felt I was not complete in my education, so I went back to school to explore other career options. I received my Master's in Marriage and Family therapy specializing in Latina/o culture in 2007. I worked for Turning Point of Central California with children and teens who experienced mental health issues for nine years. I then sought experience with adults and youth with severe mental health symptoms. The Tulare County Jail hired me to provide mental health support and work with those who experienced severe mental illness. I also worked at Champions Recovery with those who experienced substance abuse issues. Corcoran Joint Unified hired me in August 2019. I was very excited to work here. To me, this is "The House that Built Me," as I am a proud Corcoran High School graduate. I found myself coming full circle career-wise, as Corcoran is my hometown.



**What is most rewarding to you when working with students and/or in your position?** The most rewarding part of my job is the people and children I work with. Helen and Maria have put together the very best team of dedicated people. The counselors, Melissa, Alfredo, and Tifiani, help me accomplish the unthinkable every day. Yoselin, the Mental Health counselor for grades 6-12, is constant support. The psychologists Rachel, Natashaia, and Alyssa are curious and always helpful. I appreciate the opportunity to work with educators, parents, and administrators to bring an understanding of mental health conditions to the community I care deeply about. It is fulfilling to be able to provide mental health support to those who seek assistance. I enjoy working with students to find the coping mechanisms that work best for them. My greatest joy is providing Mindfulness to as many classrooms as possible.

**What special project(s) are you working on with the students or staff in your position?** Currently, I am working to provide clinical supervision to graduate students who are fulfilling their practicum hours in Corcoran. Providing supervision to those learning their mental health craft is a valuable asset for my hometown.

**Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life?** My biggest inspirations are my family and horses. Without my family's support, I could not have accomplished the many goals I have set for myself. My family is especially close. I promised my mother never to live more than 30 minutes away from her. I have kept that promise. My husband and children inspire me to keep seeking adventures; we never sit still in my house. I rode horses from a very young age. Horses taught me that I am in charge of the direction I choose to take. The horse is in charge of how fast I get there.

*Ashford-Leonardo continued next page*

**Tell us a little about yourself:** I enjoy being outdoors. As a family, we camp all year long, either in the desert or at the coast. My husband and I took a big trip to Zion national park and drove to meet up with my best (Corcoran) friend, who now lives in Idaho, last year. I have an adventurous husband, a son, and a daughter. My children do things with passion; I am amazed at watching them as adults. I have a cranky cat and the most well-behaved Queensland you could ever meet. I am passionate about meeting the needs of the children and families in this community. I hope to bring kindness and understanding of mental health conditions to those I work with.

**What is a good mental health message you would like to give to students, staff, and or parents?** Before you react, take a deep breath. The longer you take before you react, the better the outcome. I try daily to balance reflection vs. reaction. I practice gratitude every morning before I get up. I give thanks for three things I am grateful for. It's the small things that add up to a great day.

## ***Yoselin Yossagandi Perez Lopez***



**What is your work history, including your current position with CJUSD?**

I am a mental health clinician for John Muir High School and Kings Lake (6-12th grades). This is my third year with Corcoran Unified School District. I previously worked for the Tulare County Office of Education and the County of Kings for the behavioral health department and child protective services. I am a Fresno State Alumni.

**What is most rewarding to you when working with students and/or in your position?** The most rewarding part of working with the students in my position is seeing students learn about the importance of their mental wellness and seeing them work towards improving their mental wellness. It is the most rewarding to normalize mental wellness and provide that safe space where they can express, learn, and grow. I also find it rewarding that I can be that advocate for mental wellness in these students' lives and also for the staff and the administration. I always hope to influence and make a positive difference in the students' lives, even if it is a small part.

**What special project(s) are you working on with the students or staff in your position?** I am currently preparing to launch Spring Mindfulness classroom lessons and more counseling groups for my schools.

**Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life?** One of the biggest inspirations in my life has been my parents. My parents immigrated from Mexico to the United States for a better life for me. Their resiliency and hard work allowed me to be who I am today, professionally and individually. In addition, my son and my husband are my biggest inspirations because they are my driving force. I always want to continue to be better for them in every aspect of my life.

**Tell us a little about yourself:** I was born in Mexico and came to the United States when I was about six months old. I grew up in the small town of Avenal, California, the oldest of four siblings. I am married, and my husband and I have a beautiful 15-month-old son. We also have one mini Goldendoodle (Canela) and one K9 dog(Drago) that we love and adore. I love spending time with my family and friends, dancing, and trying new restaurants. I love fashion (shopping) and music. I love to travel, but I also love binge-watching Netflix.

**What is a good mental health message you would like to give to students, staff, and or parents?** I would like to tell my students and parents that it is okay to have low days and make mistakes and difficult events. They are a part of your life but not who you are. You can take those difficulties and learn, grow, reshape and come back stronger emotionally and mentally. Always practice self-care and kindness.



# Bret Harte Elementary

The Bret Harte 2023 Spelling Bee was held on January 18, 2023.

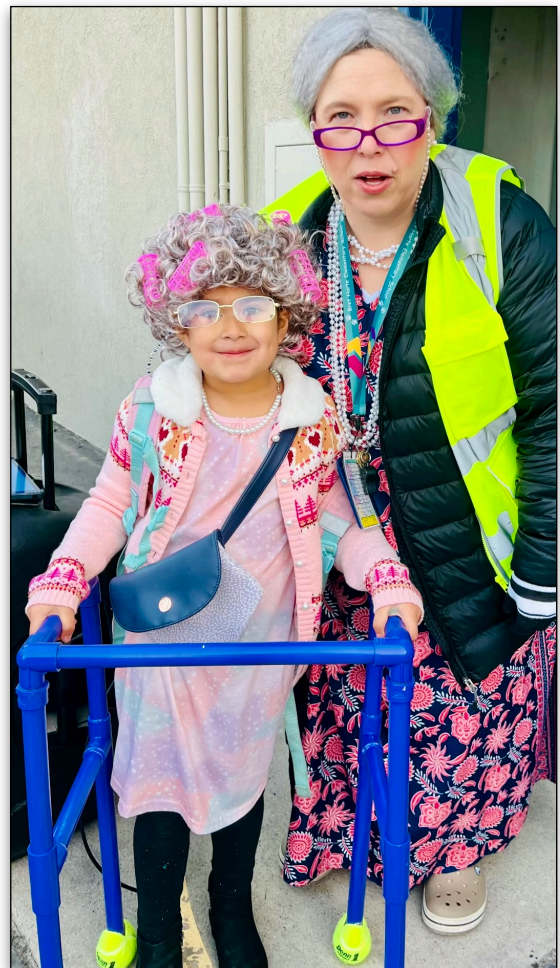


Pictured left are the winners with Principal Laurie Haas. Catalina Muthana 2nd Place, Sebastian Herrera 1st Place, and Ashley Delgado 3rd Place.

The County Spelling Bee will be held at 9:00 AM, on Tuesday, February 28, 2023, at the Lemoore High School Presentation Center.



Staff and students dressed “100 years old” to celebrate the 100th Day of School. Pictured right is staff member Kristine Scott along with an elderly elementary student!





# *John C. Fremont Elementary*

John C. Fremont had a fantastic turnout for our Spelling Bee Contests this year! Congratulations to all of our Spellers that did a fantastic job! 2nd grade winners: 1st place: Noah Mendoza, 2nd place: Yaretzy Madera and 3rd place: Ethan Lopez. 3rd grade winners: 1st place: Derek Aguilar Rojas, 2nd place: Jayden Reyes and 3rd place: Jakoby Espinoza



- January 27 - 100th day of School/ SoM TK Luncheon
- January 30 - Planetarium Bartron, Goldsworthy, Garcia & Kindness Day, wear bright colors
- February 2 - School Site Council Meeting 3:30
- February 3 - ELAC Meeting 9:00 am
- February 6 - PBIS Meeting
- February 9 - Lockdown Drill Feb 13&20- No School
- February 15 - Math Night

John C. Fremont has a Math Night scheduled for February 15. Snacks and several centers with activities for students and parents. As a reminder to parents, the second trimester ends on February 24th.

## *Mark Twain Elementary*

The Mark Twain 4th and 5th-grade spelling bee champions are preparing for the county spelling bee in March. The 4th-grade spelling bee winners are Noah Carinio and Nimzi Martinez. The 5th-grade spelling bee winners are Alexis Morales and Dominic Ramirez. Superintendent Ochoa will host "Coffee and Conversation" with Mark Twain's parents on Wednesday, February 1st, from 8:00-9:00 a.m. Teachers are organizing grade-level field trips. 4th grade will go to Mission San Miguel, and 5th grade will go to Scout Island. 5th-grade students are preparing for their day trip to SCICON. More information to parents will follow.

## *Cororan High School*

The Corcoran High School Spring Sports will start in about two weeks. Boys and Girls Basketball teams are expected to head to the playoffs along with the soccer team. ESL Wrestling Championships will be held on February 2nd. Pathway Night will be February 7th at 5 pm, and Registration for incoming first-year High school students will be February 21st at 5 pm in the Technology Learning Center.



CHS Cheer Team at their first competition in Clovis.



# TECHNOLOGY

- Technology Manager Ken Lawson replaced all the phones in the District during winter break. These new phones and systems will better integrate our all-call and lockdown system.
- The technology department will exchange Chrome Books at Kings Lake in the upcoming month.



## CONGRATULATIONS!

STAR STUDENTS.



**The CJUSD Board recognized the Districts Star Students at the board meeting on January 25. Pictured in the front row along with Superintendent is John Muir student Nicole Padilla, Corcoran High School student Kayla Barrera, Bret Harte student Brensley Urban, Kings Lake Education student Alexandra Rodriguez, and John C. Fremont student Paul Elias. Not pictured is Mark Twain student Alexiah McGee.**