

# History of Oceanside Unified School District Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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## **Preface**

*A special thank you to Kristi Hawthorne, her book, *The History of Oceanside*, and the Oceanside Historical Society for all their help in compiling the information for this document. All historical photos featured are courtesy of the Oceanside Historical Society. Thanks also to KOCT, the San Diego Union Tribune, the Oceanside Blade Tribune, the Ivey Ranch Park Association, and the North Coast Model Railroad Society for their input and contributions as well.*

*Deb Wickman*

## **Land Recognition**

*We acknowledge the Payómkawichum (the People of the West) as the traditional caretakers of the land on which the schools of the Oceanside Unified School district are built. Today, the Payómkawichum are known as Luiseño and are made up of seven bands: La Jolla, Pala, Pauma, Pechanga, Rincon, San Luis Rey, and Soboba. We are mindful of the Indigenous peoples in this place, and we pay our respects to the Luiseño –past, present, and emerging. We are grateful to be part of this community in Luiseño territory and to honor their history, culture, and perseverance of spirit.*

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## ***Introduction: A brief history of Oceanside***

For thousands of years prior to European contact, Native Americans inhabited the San Luis Rey Valley. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Spain colonized new territories in the Americas. Soon after exploration of the area by Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portola in 1769, The Mission San Luis Rey de Francia, the 18th mission in Alta California, was founded here in 1789. As the missions were established, the practice was to give the local natives names in Spanish that would associate them with their respective mission. The natives in the villages surrounding the Mission San Luis Rey became known as the San Luisenos, later shortened to Luiseno.

In 1834, the Mexican government won its independence from Spain, thus ending the Spanish control of the missions. Under secularization, the Indians were removed from Franciscan tutelage, given Mexican citizenship and assigned land which was later confiscated. In 1841, the governor of Mexico gave two brothers, Pio Pico and Andres Pico a large land grant to the land now known as Rancho Santa Margarita. More land was acquired and the ranch name was changed to Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores. Once one of the wealthiest families in California, the Picos were later forced to sell their land holdings to pay off debts. The land and ranch was sold to Juan Forster, Pio Pico's brother-in-law, in 1863, for \$14,006. Mr. Forster kept the land for a few years and then sold it to Richard O'Neill for \$250,000. O'Neill owned the land until it was sold to the United States Navy in 1942 for \$4,239,062 in order to build the largest Marine Corps base in the country. This base was named Camp Pendleton in honor of World War I Major General Joseph H. Pendleton.

The township of San Luis Rey was established in the fertile agricultural region west of the mission in the early 1870s by a group of English settlers. Andrew Jackson Myers and his son traveled from Los Angeles to San Diego via the old stagecoach route which took them through the San Luis Rey Valley. Traveling from the valley to the bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Myers noted the newly laid railroad tracks connecting Los Angeles to

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San Diego through Colton, Temecula, Fallbrook, and down the coast (The line opened in 1882).



San Luis Rey Valley circa 1898

Realizing the potential for future expansion and settlement along the coast, he applied for and was given a homestead grant for 160 acres on June 20, 1883. His home, the first built in Oceanside, stood where the current Library and Civic Center are located at the corner of Pier View Way and Coast Highway. J. Chauncey Hayes, another prominent figure in the developing town, applied for the first post office grant with the name *Ocean Side*. The name was later changed to *Oceanside*.

On July 3, 1888, the city of Oceanside was incorporated.



Oceanside circa 1890

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## The Early Years of Public Education in Oceanside

The first public school established in what is now Oceanside, was located in the San Luis Rey Valley.

**San Luis Rey School** was opened in 1869 to serve the children of the farming and ranching families of the valley. The one-room schoolhouse that stands on the grounds of the Mission San Luis Rey was built in 1911 to replace the original schoolhouse. It is now the Pablo Tac Hall.



Early records indicate that **Oceanside High School** was opened in 1880 but soon closed in 1883 and converted to a barn.

In 1885, Samuel Tyson opened a temporary schoolhouse, the **Oceanside Grammar School**, on the corner of Second and Hill Streets (Mission and Coast Highway). The school opened with 19 students.

The **Horne Street School**, formerly the **Oceanside Grammar School**, was opened in 1887/1888. The permanent structure opened with 100 students in three classrooms, spanning nine grade levels.

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## The city of Oceanside was incorporated on July 3, 1888

In 1888 the ***South Oceanside School District*** was formed. South Oceanside was a separate townsite until its annexation by Oceanside in 1890.

Construction for the ***South Oceanside Grammar School*** began in August of 1889. The original school house, a two story brick building, was located on the corner of Whaley and Ditmar streets. Over the years the school experienced low and erratic attendance averaging around 14-18 students per year. Sometime during the early 1900's the school building was dismantled and rebuilt as a single story building. The school was permanently closed in 1924.

Link to Oceanside Historical Society article [The History of the First South Oceanside School](#)



In 1890, the ***Libby School District*** was formed.

Up until 1890, students in the San Luis Rey Valley attended classes at the ***San Luis Rey School***, however, it wasn't always easy for students to access the school due to the San Luis Rey river which frequently overflowed its banks during winter rains and the unreliability of bridges. Rebecca Libby Foss, sister of Benjamin Franklin Libby and Henry Libby, offered an empty house on her property for use as a classroom. The site was located on the east side of the San Luis Rey river where it curves towards what is now Camp Pendleton. Eventually she

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sold the parcel of land for \$50 to the **Libby School District** for a permanent structure to be built. The school was named **Libby School**, after the founding family. Classes began at the temporary site in August of 1890. Benjamin and Henry began raising money for a permanent building. They raised \$1,000, enough to build a typical 1,093 square foot one-room schoolhouse. The new school opened for classes on December 12, 1893, with 16 students in attendance. In 1921, attendance jumped to 19. The one-room schoolhouse was in continuous use until 1949. It now stands in Heritage Park, located behind the mission on Peyri Drive. The current **Libby Elementary** was built in the same area, but at a different site.

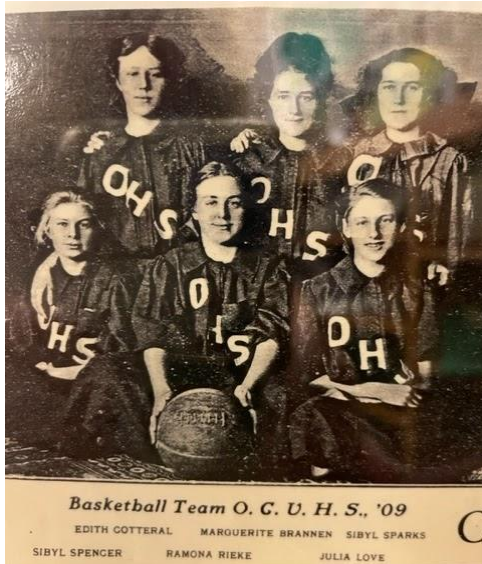
Link to Oceanside Historical Society article: [Libby School](#)



In 1906, the **Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School** was built. Schools feeding into the high school included those located in Oceanside, South Oceanside, Carlsbad, San Luis Rey, Libby, Calvera, Cardiff, Delphy, Green Valley, Vista, Del Mar, and Encinitas. The Oceanside location was chosen due to the fact that it was more centrally located. Many students rode the train to attend high school. High school classes took place on the second floor with elementary classes on the ground floor of the building located on Horne Street. The only classes offered at that time were algebra, Latin, history, English, and a few commercial classes.

*Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School  
circa 1906*





The first graduation took place in 1909 at the Mildred Opera House on Tremont Street. Five girls made up the graduating class (Marguerite Brannen, Ramona Rieke, Sybil Spencer, Edith Cotterel, and Eunice Everett). They also represented the high school in basketball that year and were the first championship team.

In 1913 a separate high school was built at a cost of \$15,000 with four classrooms, a study hall and office.

There were 55 students and a staff of four. A science building was added in 1920. In 1938 a new wing was

added to the high school, The first graduation at the bandshell was held in 1960.



*Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School 1913*



*Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School 1960*



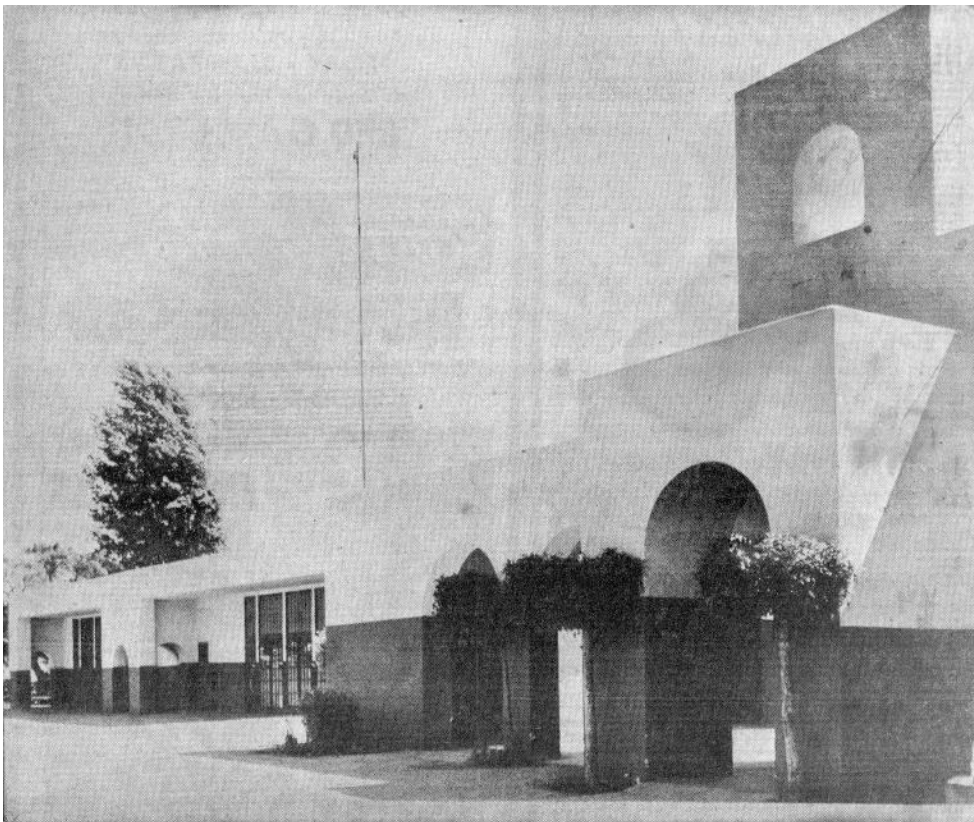
*Oceanside High School today*

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The ***Oceanside Grammar School District*** was formed sometime between 1908 and 1926 separating the elementary and high schools into separate districts.

The ***Nevada Street Kindergarten School*** was opened in the 1930's. The school, located on south Nevada Street, was designed by renowned architect Irving J. Gill, responsible for many of the iconic buildings in Oceanside, including the original city hall and police station. The school served students, kindergarten through third grade living in northern Oceanside neighborhoods. The school was condemned and closed in the early 1950's.

Link to Oceanside Historical Society article: [The Nevada Street School](#)



*The Nevada Street Kindergarten*

The ***Americanization School***, also designed by Irving J. Gill, opened in 1931. During the 1930s and early 40s there was an influx of laborers who worked the fields of the San Luis Rey Valley and the Rancho Santa Margarita (now Camp Pendleton). Many of them settled in the

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Eastside neighborhood and spoke only Spanish. The children of those families were sent to the ***Americanization School*** to be immersed in English and U.S. Civics.



By 1943, the wave of immigration had slowed down so the ***Americanization School*** began teaching a standard elementary curriculum and the name of the school was changed to the ***Division Street School*** for its location on Division street. The school was closed in 1951 and now serves as the Crown Heights Community Resource Center.

Link to KOCT video on the [Americanization School and Division Street School](#)



In 1940, there were approximately 600 students enrolled in Oceanside schools. With the opening of Camp Pendleton in 1942, a huge influx of families to the base and the Oceanside

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area caused area schools to “burst at the seams” necessitating double sessions to accommodate the increasing number of students. In 1945, the ***Mission Road School*** opened using buildings located on Mission Avenue, just east of Canyon, as a makeshift school to accommodate the increasing enrollment. The buildings, part of the “guayule rubber project” were leased from the federal government for \$1 per year. Upon completion of the new ***Mission Elementary*** school in 1953, the ***Mission Road School*** was closed, however, the district continued to use the building for utility purposes. The remaining building is the current warehouse at 2070 Mission Avenue.

\*The Manzanar Guayule Project was a scientific research group based at the Manzanar concentration camp. Led by a team of Japanese American scientists in partnership with the California Institute of Technology and the federal government, the project’s main focus was to develop a natural rubber substitute using the guayule shrub.

In 1947, ***South Oceanside Elementary***, formerly the ***South Oceanside Grammar School***, was opened. (See history of ***South Oceanside Grammar School*** above)



In 1949, ***Ditmar Elementary*** was opened. It was named for its location on Ditmar Street. The school was closed in 2008, however the location was used as temporary housing during the modernization of ***Mission*** and ***Palmquist*** elementary schools. The site also served as temporary home to the ***Adult Transition Program (ATP)*** until they relocated to the ***Clair Burgener*** site. The buildings now serve as home to ***Surfside Educational Academy***.



*Ditmar Elementary*

In the late 1940s, ***San Luis Rey School District*** merged with the ***Oceanside School District***. Along with the school, the district also unknowingly became the trustee of the Pioneer Cemetery, previously under the stewardship of the ***San Luis Rey School District***. In 2021 the ***Oceanside Unified School District*** turned the land and trust of the cemetery over to the Oceanside Historical Society.

Link to the Oceanside Historical Society article [The San Luis Rey Pioneer Cemetery](#)



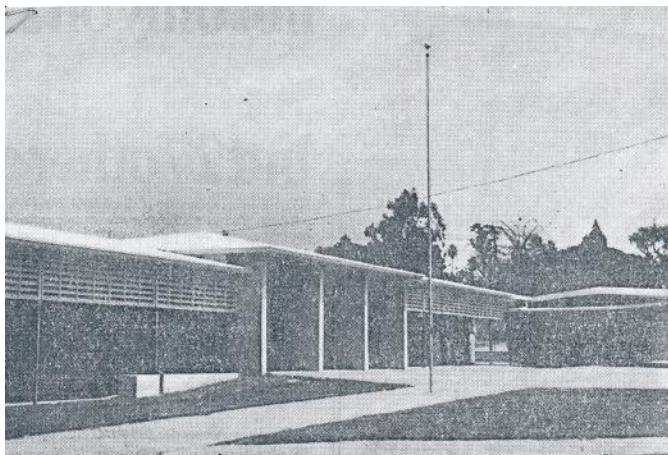
The ***Post School***, located in Area 17 on Camp Pendleton was operated under the supervision of the ***Oceanside School District*** from 1949-1952.

In 1951, the ***Libby School District*** merged with the ***Oceanside School District*** to form the ***Oceanside-Libby Union School District***.

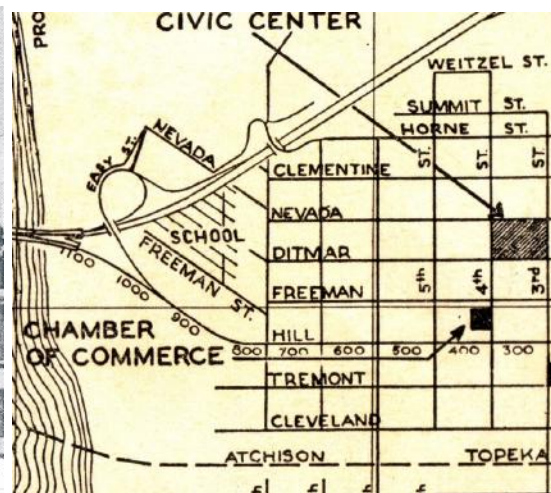
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In 1951, the **North Oceanside School** was built to accommodate families living north of Mission Avenue, North Oceanside Terrace (the area adjacent to Camp Pendleton along Capistrano Drive), and the Homojo housing project near the main gate of Camp Pendleton. By 1954, construction began to increase the number of classrooms to accommodate the growing number of students. After completion the school had 10 classrooms, two kindergartens, and a multipurpose room. In 1965 it was announced that the land the school was built on would be used for the main interchange connecting Interstate 5 with Hill Street (Coast Highway). The school was closed in 1968.

Link to Oceanside Historical Society article: [The Story of the North Oceanside School](#)



North Oceanside School's days are numbered. The plant will be destroyed within three years to make way for a freeway. School officials hope to continue use of the plant until June, 1968.



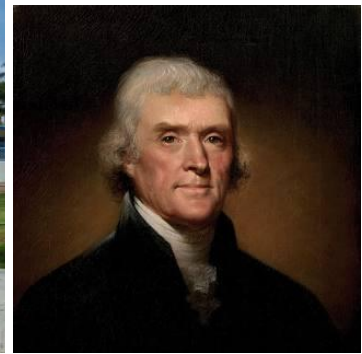
*North Oceanside School*

1953 saw the opening of the new **Mission Elementary** school, adjacent to the site of the old **Mission Road School**. The school underwent modernization in 2013.



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In 1954, **Jefferson Middle School** was opened. At a cost of \$630,000, the middle school consisted of nine classrooms, an art room, science room, library, homemaking room, woodshop, boys' and girls' locker room, a multi-purpose room and administration facility. This was the district's "first venture into the junior high school philosophy of grades separation." As was common for the times, the school was named after Thomas Jefferson, an American statesman, diplomat, lawyer, architect, and Founding Father who served as the third president of the United States from 1801-1809.



**Laurel Elementary** was opened in 1955. Located on Laurel Street in the Eastside neighborhood, sometimes referred to as "Posole." The name "Posole" is sometimes attributed to a hard working resident of the Eastside, Anita Cruz Romero. To supplement her income, she sold her home-made posole soup. Sra. Romero would place her soup pot on top of a little red wagon and walk through the neighborhood shouting, "Posole, posole!"

Link to Oceanside Historical Society article: [Eastside Neighborhood](#)



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**North Terrace Elementary**, opened for classes in 1956. It was named for its location in the North Oceanside Terrace neighborhood of Oceanside. Originally built as an elementary school to serve the civilian families of the north Oceanside neighborhood and the military families of Camp Pendleton, the school was converted to a K-8 school in 2012.



In January, 1956, the current district administration office opened, replacing the condemned building on Horne Street which housed the previous offices.



In 1958, the **Oceanside-Libby School District** became the **Oceanside Union School District**

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**Santa Margarita Elementary** opened for classes in 1961. Located on base and named in honor of the Rancho Santa Margarita. On July 20, 1769, Captain Gaspar de Portola led an expeditionary force from lower California, seeking land to establish Franciscan missions throughout California. They arrived at a location, now known as Camp Pendleton on the holy day of St. Margaret and named the land “Santa Margarita”. The school was later changed to accommodate students K-8 and underwent modernization in 2011.



In 1962 **Palmquist Elementary** welcomed students. Named for Oscar R. Palmquist, former principal of South Oceanside Elementary and high school teacher. The school was modernized and rededicated in 2013.

Link to Oceanside Historical Society info on [Palmquist land acquisition](#) and namesake, [Oscar R. Palmquist](#)



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The new **San Luis Rey Elementary** opened in 1963. The previous building is located on the Mission San Luis Rey grounds. In 2022, the school was renamed the **Pablo Tac School of the Arts** in honor of Pablo Tac, a Native American born at the Mission San Luis Rey de Francia in 1820. In 1832, Pablo Tac traveled to Rome with Fr. Peyri to further his education at the “College of Propaganda.” He studied Latin, philosophy, rhetoric, and theology. He developed a written grammar and a Luiseno Spanish dictionary. His writings are the only primary source on the Luiseno language and culture, written by a Luiseno, until the twentieth century. He died in Rome, Italy in 1841. **Pablo Tac School of the Arts** is currently undergoing modernization.



**Lincoln Middle School** opened in 1963. Named in honor of Abraham Lincoln, an American lawyer, politician, and statesman who served as the 16th president of the United States from 1861 until his assassination in 1865.



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The current **Libby Elementary** welcomed students in 1966. It was modernized and rededicated in August of 2012. (See above for history of Libby School).



1969 was the opening date for **San Rafael Elementary** school located at the front gate of Camp Pendleton. The district closed the school in 2004 after engineers determined the construction of the buildings didn't meet earthquake safety standards. Students were transferred to other base schools and the buildings were demolished in 2007.

Link to Oceanside Blade Tribune article on [San Rafael Opening](#).



In 1969, **E.G. Garrison Elementary** opened. Named for Elra Gill Garrison, who served in the **Oceanside Union School District** as Assistant Superintendent, Business Services and Deputy Superintendent. He also served as acting Superintendent in 1967 prior to the naming of Rod Moore as Superintendent of Schools. In 2019 the school merged with **San Luis Rey Elementary** due to sinkholes discovered on the property, with the intention of repairing the damage and reopening the school. It was later determined that the cost of repairs was prohibitive and the school was closed permanently.

Link to Oceanside Historical Society information on [E.G. Garrison](#)



*E.G. Garrison Elementary*

***Pacifica Elementary*** opened in 1970, possibly named for its proximity to the Pacific Ocean. The district was forced to close the building in 2004 when engineers determined the structures did not meet earthquake safety standards. Portable trailers were moved onto the site and served as temporary classrooms until 2007. ***Pacifica*** was officially closed in 2007, however, the site was used as a temporary location for both ***Del Rio*** and ***Libby*** as they underwent modernization in 2010 and 2012 respectively. It was determined that the site was no longer a viable location due to declining enrollment in the district and its close proximity to ***Libby, Reynolds, Del Rio***, and the addition of ***Foussat*** elementary in 2007. The district sold the property in December of 2021.



The ***Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School District*** split in June of 1970, resulting in the establishment of the ***Oceanside Union High School District***.

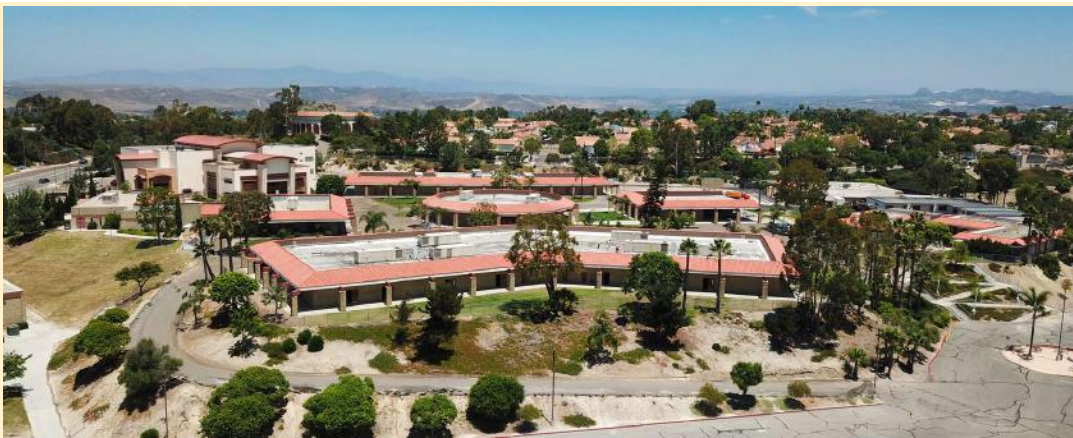
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The ***Oceanside Union School District*** and ***Oceanside Union High School District*** merged in 1971 to form the current ***Oceanside Unified School District***.



***Oceanside High School East*** was opened in 1971. The school board voted to establish the one high school, dual campus plan, rather than establishing two separate four-year high schools. This decision was based partially on the difficulty of establishing school attendance boundary lines with equal ethnic populations between the two campuses, and the lack of certain facilities at the east campus. Juniors and seniors attended ***Oceanside High School East*** while freshman and sophomores attended the ***Oceanside High School*** west campus. Students were bussed between the two campuses to take certain classes such as art, industrial arts and photography.

The school board voted on April 22, 1975 to change from the dual campus model to two separate high schools. The ***Oceanside High School East*** name was changed to ***El Camino High School*** in honor of its location along the historic ***El Camino Real***.



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**Clair W. Burgener Academy** opened in 1971. **Clair W. Burgener Academy** was established as a campus focusing on students with special needs. The campus was named after Clair Walter Burgener, a member of the California State Assembly, California State Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives. Having a developmentally disabled son, Burgener focused much attention on the mentally disabled and headed various associations and committees helping intellectually disabled children. With the introduction of mainstreaming and educating students with special needs in the least restrictive environment, staff and students were reassigned to other sites across the district. The site has hosted several programs over the years, including most recently, the Academic Recovery Center. Currently the site is home for the Adult Transition Program (ATP) , Migrant Education, and Nutrition Services.



In 1973 **Del Rio Elementary** was opened. The name translates to “from the river” in honor of its location near the San Luis Rey river. The campus was modernized and rededicated in 2012.



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**Ocean Shores High School** opened in 1978. The program moved to the former **Ditmar** site in 2019 and merged with the Academic Recovery and independent studies programs as **Surfside Educational Academy & High School**. In 2021 the city of Oceanside purchased the property and converted it to the Oceanside Navigation Center.



**Reynolds Elementary** opened its doors in 1987. Named for Mary Reynolds Ronsse. Born in 1891, Reynolds is reportedly the first child born in the English colony established in the San Luis Rey Valley in 1888. She was the first child to be baptized at the All Saints Episcopalian Church, located behind Mission San Luis Rey and was also a student of the **Libby School** from 1900-1903. In 1916 she briefly attended school at **Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School**, and later worked at the high school from 1933 until 1957.

**Reynolds Elementary** was closed in June of 2023 due to the instability of the land the school was built on and possibility of liquefaction in the event of an earthquake under current earthquake safety regulations.

San Diego Tribune article on [Reynolds School Opening](#)



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In 1989 **Christa McAuliffe Elementary** was opened. Named for social studies teacher and astronaut, Christa McAuliffe who died in the Challenger Space Shuttle explosion in 1986. McAuliffe was selected from a pool of over 11,000 applicants to participate in the NASA Teacher in Space program. As the first teacher in space, McAuliffe was scheduled to teach two lessons during the Challenger mission. On January 28, 1986, the shuttle Challenger broke apart 1 minute 13 seconds after launch.



**Ivey Ranch Elementary** welcomed students in 1991. The school was named for the Ivey Ranch neighborhood of Oceanside where it's located. This area was once part of ranch lands that were purchased by Otis Ivey in 1937. The original ranch house, built in 1889 still stands across from the Mission San Luis Rey at the corner of Mission Ave. and Rancho del Oro. Mr. Ivey died in 1978 at which time the Ivey Trust held the land until the City of Oceanside acquired it in 1981. Part of the land was set aside as parkland and is now the Ivey Ranch Park.



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**Martin Luther King Middle School** opened for students in 1994. The school was named for Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist minister and social activist who led the civil rights movement in the United States from the mid 1950s until his assassination in 1968.



In 1998, the third base school, **Stuart Mesa Elementary** was opened. Named for Edward Bradbury (E.B.) Stuart, an employee of the Southern California Railroad. In 1885, E.B. Stuart was assigned station manager of the Santa Fe station in San Diego. A milepost marker along the railroad tracks approaching Oceanside from Los Angeles was labeled “Stuart #220.” The mesa, located north of Oceanside and east of the Santa Fe tracks was named after Stuart posthumously in 1938. Camp Pendleton refers to the area as the Stuart Mesa housing area. The school was changed from an elementary school to a K-8 school in 2012.

Link to North County Model Railroad Society article [Stuart Mesa and E.B. Stuart](#)



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**Nichols Elementary** was opened in 2002. Named for Robert Nichols, a military veteran and long time trustee of the Oceanside Unified School District school board.



In 2007 **Foussat Elementary** opened its doors. It was named for Louise Munoa Foussat, born in 1908 in a saloon that is now the San Luis Rey Bakery. Her mother was from the Pala band and her father was from the Pechanga band of Luisenos. Her ancestors lived in a village on the Mission San Luis Rey site and helped the Fransican missionaries build the mission. She spent her life telling stories of the Native Americans and nurturing the Luiseno culture.



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**Chavez Middle School**, the newest addition to the school district, opened in 2008. The school was named for Cesar Chavez, an American labor leader and civil rights activist. Along with Dolores Huerta, he co-founded the National Farm Workers Association, which later merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to become the United Farm Workers labor union.



**Surfside Educational Academy** was established in 2020 on the former site of **Ditmar Elementary**. **Surfside** offers an alternative education experience with opportunities for distance, blended, and direct instruction for students K-12.



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## The Future of the Oceanside Unified School District

The face of education in Oceanside has changed significantly over the past decades in response to the needs of the community. Currently, the district is home to approximately 15,000 students over 22 sites including: eleven elementaries, three K-8 schools, four middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, one K-12 alternative education program, and one adult transition school.

Thanks to the voters of Oceanside, three bond measures, Proposition G in March 2000 for \$125 million, Proposition H in 2008 for \$195 million, and Measure W in November 2020 for \$160 million have been approved allowing for much needed improvements and modernizations to aging classrooms and school facilities across the district. Current projects include providing shade structures, new playground equipment and upgrading HVAC equipment at multiple campuses across the district. Larger projects underway are the improvement of the ***El Camino High School*** Truax theater exterior, new tracks and fields at ***El Camino High School*** and ***Oceanside High School***, modernization and new gym/MPR at ***Jefferson Middle School***, and modernization of ***Surfside Education Academy*** and ***Pablo Tac School of the Arts***.

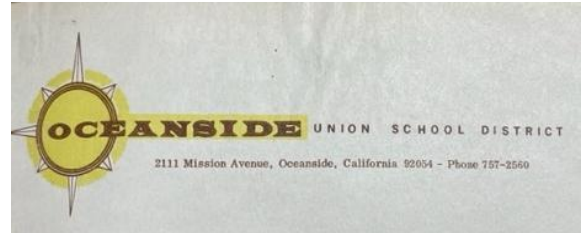
Another big project in the beginning stages of development is the building of new district offices utilizing general funds from the sale of assets and developer fees. The professional offices as well as the maintenance and operations side are scheduled for a complete rebuild. This much needed construction will allow for the consolidation of district office departments and personnel under one roof.

The school district has changed significantly over the years in response to the changes of an ever growing and evolving city. Who knows what the future will hold, but this story isn't finished....

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## ***Superintendents over the years***

Jack R. Tenney	1931-1946
Stewart N. White	1946-1952
Ben F. Fugate	1952-1963
Dr. Charles H. Reed	1963-March 30, 1967
Mr. E.G.Garrison	April 1967-June 1967
Mr. Roderic V. Moore	1967-1981 (Superintendent of the elementary district)
Al Lafleur	1970's (Superintendent of the high school district)
Dr. Bishop	1981-1983
Dr. Steven F. Speech	1983-1997
Kenneth Noonan	1998-2007
Larry Perondi	2007-2014
Dr. Duane Coleman	2014-2018
Dr. Julie Vitale	July, 2018-present



**OCEANSIDE**  
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