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NEWS RELEASE

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Bonita Unified Elementary Students Explore Learning Differences, Resources through Inclusion Fair

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Shull Elementary School students explored sensory activities and danced alongside classmates during the school's inaugural Inclusion Fair on Oct. 9, introducing students to resources that support different learning needs and encouraged them to help every peer feel welcome.

Students visited stations led by school staff, discovering tools that help students with disabilities participate and succeed socially and academically. The fair culminated a week of classroom lessons about recognizing differences, avoiding assumptions, and identifying barriers that can keep others from joining in.

"I want the kids to take responsibility and ownership for recognizing that everybody's different, and they may need something different to feel like they're included," Shull Mental Health Support Specialist Ashley Connolly said. "I just really want our school community to come together to help everyone feel supported here."

The fair featured coping tools and sensory tables, a health-related station led by the school nurse, and activities demonstrated by the adaptive physical education teacher. The school librarian shared books about inclusion and differences, while the performing arts teacher led dancing and activities that helped students practice including peers with different communication or physical needs.

To prepare for the event, school mental health staff selected short videos featuring people with physical and cognitive disabilities and developed discussion questions for teachers to use throughout the week. One video featured a girl who used a computer to communicate and explained that she wanted people to speak with her and ask questions rather than feel sorry for her. Teachers reported that the videos prompted discussions and helped students better understand others' experiences.

Student council members helped younger students navigate the fair's activities, including fifth grader Ariah Trujillo, who was especially involved with event setup and guiding students through different stations.

"It makes me happy when the kids are happy," Trujillo said. "When someone feels sad, you should go up to them and try talking to them and include them when you're with your friends."

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The event grew out of conversations between Connolly and general education teachers after Shull added an Extensive Support Needs (ESN) classroom this school year, where teachers provide specialized instruction and support for students with disabilities who need more intensive assistance.

Bonita Unified hosts a variety of events throughout the year to celebrate inclusive learning. Ekstrand and Grace Miller elementary schools have held their own inclusion fairs; Gladstone Elementary offers an annual "Be You" Night that teaches students about neurodiversity during Autism Acceptance Month; the District hosts an annual Sports Festival that brings together students with disabilities for a field day of friendly competition; and staff from Specialized Services give hands-on presentations to students about inclusion in the classroom.

"Our school community really came together to make this event happen, it started with a few of us brainstorming, and so many others offered to pitch in," Shull Elementary Principal Dr. Christine Wilson said. "Some students do not have the context to understand the differences they notice in others, and this event is helping us develop a common language and understanding as a school to help all our students feel included and valued."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

BUSD_INCLUSION1: Shull Elementary School students explore inclusion empowering activities during the school's inaugural Inclusion Fair on Oct. 9, learning how different tools can help their classmates feel included in and out of the classroom.

BUSD_INCLUSION2: Shull Elementary School students engage in hands-on activities during the school's inaugural Inclusion Fair on Oct. 9, learning about different needs and ways to help every classmate feel welcome.

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