



THE
STAR

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State honors two T.O. schools

EXCELLENCE: T.O.
*High, Colina Middle
schools recognized for
overall quality.*

By Jean Cowden Moore
Staff writer

For years, Thousand Oaks High School has been known for its outstanding band. Now, the school has been honored not only for its entire arts program, but also for its strong academics and many involved students.

Thousand Oaks High and Colina Middle School are among seven Ventura County secondary schools to be named California Distinguished schools this week.

Anticipating the award, Thousand Oaks High held a carnival — a celebration of excellence — for students and teachers Friday, complete with free junk food and dunking booths.

“We had a good feeling we would be recognized as a distinguished school,” said Assistant Principal Martin Manzer. “It was kind of what we expected to hear, but it was nice to finally hear it.”

The award, given by the California Department of Education, recognizes schools that post high test scores, have lots of involved parents, provide the latest technology and offers innovative programs for both students and teachers.

Thousand Oaks High also was one of six schools in the state to receive an honorable mention for Excellence in Arts Education.

The high school has award-winning bands and choirs, a handbell group, and a range of

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fine and performing arts classes, which together have attracted half of its 2,400 students.

Just about as many students participate in sports. And for kids who aren't artistic or athletic, there are 75 clubs.

“There's a diverse population of students at our school,” said junior Jane Lin, 17. “By having a range of activities, they can reach the entire school, and not just one selective group.”

Colina Middle School consistently posts some of the highest test scores in the county, but administrators also pointed to the services — counseling, in particular — the school offers students and parents.

Every Wednesday morning, teachers, counselors, administrators and a psychologist gather to talk about kids who are struggling academically or emotionally. Monday nights, administrators and counselors make appointments

to meet with parents who work during the day.

The school also has a Web site where students can check their homework assignments. And if kids don't turn in their homework, their parents automatically get a call that night.

“We have a lot of adults who are watchful for how (each) child is doing,” said Assistant Principal Margaret Saleh. “We really do watch for their safety — for their emotional safety, as well.”

So where do these schools plan to go from here? Both intend to apply next fall for the national Blue Ribbon Award, given by the U.S. Department of Education to outstanding schools nationwide.

Two Conejo Valley elementary schools — Cypress and University — will find out in late May whether they are Blue Ribbon schools. Oak Hills School in Oak Park is also up for the honor.

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