



A COLLECTION OF STORIES

About Immigrant Students

Written by Cajon Valley teachers



Few professions in America have more daily interaction and long-term impact on immigrants than teaching. As teachers listen and get to know their students deeply, they impart not only knowledge, but orientation, hope, and guidance in a new reality. Teachers get the opportunity to introduce America to a whole new group of Americans, and create atmospheres for learning that bring all types of students together.

In 2017, our school district put out a call for stories from teachers about their experiences with immigrant students. We wanted to better understand and respond to the impact of immigrant and refugee arrivals in our classrooms. What emerged is a collection of stories authored by educators who are truly changing the world. The stories are as varied as the students themselves. Some are uplifting and lighthearted; others are tough. Teachers are front-line observers to everyday happenings in their community, and here we get a glimpse of their unique perspective, insight, and compassion.

El Cajon, where we teach, is a national refugee resettlement destination. Our district has received over 850 newly arrived students in the 2016-2017 school year alone, from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and a handful of African and Latin American countries. In total, refugee children comprise over 19% of our student body, nearly 1 in 5 students in our district.

We have been careful to protect the confidentiality and cultural traditions of students described in this book. We have not used their real names, and pictures are not necessarily of students described in the stories. Teacher names are presented with the level of confidentiality preferred by the teacher.

We'd love to hear from readers of this book. Are you an ally hoping to do right by immigrant and refugee kids? Please reach out to us with your thoughts and ideas.

Eyal Bergman

Cajon Valley Union School District

Family & Community Engagement Officer

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“I’m especially thankful for a loving, caring and patient group of students. I truly feel that she is so comfortable and so confident because they have created a safe haven for her to soar.”

Rita Nafsu
Rancho San Diego Elementary School

Zahraa is in my first grade class. She started on the first day of school with no English. The students were fascinated with her from day one. I speak Arabic so luckily I was able to communicate with her. The other students always wanted to know what Zahraa was saying/asking. I told the kids it was our job to make sure we teach Zahraa English. I asked them to try and teach her at least one word a day. They immediately loved the idea and have been doing so ever since. They always come up to me to say “Zahraa just said _____, or I taught Zahraa _____.” Needless to say, Zahraa has grown so much since that first day. She has gained so much confidence. She is constantly raising her hand to share, participates in all classroom discussions and has delivered two oral presentations. She is amazing. I am thankful for her supportive parents who constantly ask for clarification and ideas on how to help her. I’m especially thankful for a loving, caring and patient group of students. I truly feel that she is so comfortable and so confident because they have created a safe haven for her to soar.

Michelle Meade

Hillsdale Middle School

Karina is an immigrant from Colombia. She and her family came to the U.S., and immediately became involved in our community. Her mother, who was a music teacher in Colombia, starting volunteering in class and was elected our ELAC president. Her daughters (the oldest is now at Valhalla High School) integrated with the Middle Eastern community, and have friends from Iraq and the UAE. They are fun to watch as they find similarities between Arabic and Spanish. Ana’s mother now substitutes regularly in our district, and because of her advanced knowledge of our government institutions, she is helping newly-arrived Middle Eastern families navigate enrolling in college, getting a driver’s license, etc.



Teacher doing a home visit with a Middle Eastern family

Kathleen Shevlin

Johnson Elementary School

Zain is in my third grade class at Johnson this year. Zain’s parents fled Lebanon with the hopes of coming to the United States to provide a safe, stable environment for their family. His father worked with the U.S. military and realized he would be a target if he stayed.

Zain constantly tries to help other students who are struggling with math, and he regularly helps me translate for Arabic-speaking newcomers.

Recently I was honored to be a guest, along with another teacher, in Zain’s home. We stopped by after work for a home visit so we could get to know them better. The family was thrilled to invite us into their home and the four children were beyond excited. A large feast of traditional Lebanese food was prepared for us. It was delicious! We learned the father has continued working with the U.S. military here in training operations. He is so incredibly thankful for the opportunity to live in the U.S. and to be able to provide for his family in a safe, supporting environment. They live in a very modest 2-bedroom apartment but the joy and love exhibited by the entire family was overwhelming. It’s been such a privilege and joy to have Zain in my class this year.

“He is so incredibly thankful for the opportunity to live in the U.S. and to be able to provide for his family in a safe, supporting environment.”

Barbara Austin and Janice Raymond

Chase Avenue Elementary School

For most of our students, being at Chase Avenue Elementary feels safe. Students are excited to learn, and have plenty of opportunities to share stories and be heard. We have our students for 3 hrs. every day, and many attend the after school RSIG (Refugee School Impact Grant) program. While still showing effects of trauma, students are enjoying their peers, and their learning experiences. Their families are grateful to be here, and have the support of the school and community. We have the support of families as well, as they try and transition to a new country, culture, and language. We learn from our students everyday, at least as much as they learn from us! We ask about their lives, and so they tell us. Here are some of the things we've heard:

Gabriel's father sent his mother back to Mexico with the baby because he was worried for their safety. He lives with his aunt. Gabriel feels worried. He travels to Mexico on the weekends, and comes back, often late, on Monday.

Abdulazeez came from Iraq (via several countries) through Mexico. In Iraq, his family experienced kidnapping and violence in Baghdad. They fled to Mosul, encountered ISIS, returned to Baghdad and fled to Jordan. They paid someone to bring them to the U.S. but they could not afford to bring everyone, so Abdulazeez's father is still in Baghdad. His mother was held in Mexico in a detention center, while the children were taken to a boys home in Chicago. At the time, Abdulazeez was fearful about being killed in the home as a result of his experiences in Iraq. Eventually the boys were united with their grandmother in El Cajon, and 5 months later mom was granted asylum. Dad is still in Iraq. Abdulazeez struggles with disruptive behaviors, but we love him, and we believe in him.



Cajon Valley students in the garden at their school

Adnan's grandmother came here from Iraq, she was detained in the airport for several hours in Los Angeles. Adnan did not understand why. She was released when the court put a "stay" on the President's executive order.

Flor is extremely worried about her parents being deported back to Mexico. She is sad and withdrawn.

Hana's father is still in Turkey, and the family is having trouble because their marriage certificate has been lost in all the upheaval in their flight from Iraq. The girls miss their father very much and Lobna says that her mom is thinking of returning to the Middle East to be with dad.

Bway Paw is a Karen from Myanmar, who was born in Thailand in a refugee camp. Her father was killed by the army while she was just an infant and her mother was pregnant with Bway Paw's brother. Without a father, the family lost status in the refugee camp and they struggled to survive. She did not have the opportunity to attend school until she came to the U.S. at the end of 2nd grade.



Two newcomer students in middle school

Teacher Misty
Rios Elementary School

Two girls in my 5th grade class are from the Congo. I have been told they have lived their whole lives in a refugee camp. I'm sure they have experienced things in their lifetime that Americans can't even imagine. Well, Nehema and Adelphine are the most loving, sweet, eager-to-learn kids. They are the joy of my life. They are so fast to pick up English phrases. They are always joking around with other students and being silly. They learned "bathroom" right away, which is "bafuni" in Swahili (yes, they are teaching me Swahili). They were being silly and started teasing a fellow student and calling him bathroom. Obviously this isn't terribly appropriate but we all laughed. We have seven Congolese kids altogether at Rios ranging from 1st to 5th grade. My Nehema is the leader. She makes sure she has all of her "little ducklings" before getting on the bus. We always walk to the bus together and both of my girls give me huge hugs and lots of goodbyes before they leave. The human spirit always amazes me. I can't imagine what life has thrown at them, and yet they are still happy and full of life.

David Olsen-Pederson
Emerald Middle School

My student, who was born and raised in Syria, forced to flee to Jordan, and finally ended up in the United States, has brought with him an intelligent mind and a huge desire to learn. His father, who was an architect in Syria, greatly misses his profession. This young boy of 13 told me of how in Jordan everyone would yell at him and other Syrians to return to Syria. Here in the United States, he finally feels welcome, and is ready to begin achieving his dreams. I feel blessed to be able to help him begin his new journey.

A few weeks ago I told my newcomer students my mom's birthday was the following day. They were very excited and wanted to do something special for her. I told them we could call her up, place her on speaker phone, and sing to her happy birthday in English and Arabic.

We called my mom on her birthday, sang to her, and she was very touched. At the end of the day, two of my students came up with roses that I had seen on their desks. They gave them to me to give to my mom. I told them she lived 2000 miles away, but would take a picture of them and send it to her. The kind acts of all my students and of the two girls presenting the roses to me for my mom will stay in my memory forever.



David Olsen's Newcomer Class at Emerald Middle School with Congresswoman Susan Davis

Paul Plumb

Emerald Middle School

I had been teaching at the elementary level for 33 years before I came to Emerald Middle School. I have always loved and been passionate about teaching! The last 18 months have been the most rewarding and fun of my entire career. Because of this, the amazing students that I serve, I have worked hundreds of hours, many full days on weekends and on breaks, not because it's my job or for the paycheck, but simply because I'm working with such a deserving group of kids who are motivated to learn. We simply can't let these kids down! Three stories stand out the most to me.

Amira, a 7th grader, was in my class when I arrived at Emerald. It was her second year in the U.S. She could say her alphabet but could not write it. She could write her numbers and count aloud to 100 but did not know her basic math facts. Like many of my refugee students, she didn't just work at school, she came to school one hour early every morning for extra help. She worked at home in the evenings and on the weekends, and many times she would meet me at the public library on weekends and over school breaks along with many other students in the class. My favorite part of the story is that the week before Christmas break, she came up to my desk with tears in her eyes, and thanked me for teaching her how to read. She said, "I didn't think it would happen, because I came to school too late!" Now, just a little over a year later, Amira is in the general student population getting above average grades and reading at the fourth grade level. Amira is a very bright young lady, with over-the-top motivation, and an amazing attitude towards her new country and the potential she has for the future.

Nayef, a 7th grader, came in late October last year. He had been in refugee camps for 6 years and had not been in school since kindergarten. He could not read or write any language. He considered himself stupid and a loser. He had given up and had no hope for the future. It took a couple of months just to get him

to come out of his shell and start to try to learn. Now, just a little over a year later, his whole outlook on life has radically changed. His face is bright instead of downcast. He is reading on the high second grade level, has no behavioral issues, and believes that he is ready to perform and succeed in life! He loves the USA and wants to be a doctor if professional soccer does not work out. Almost every day he stops by my room and thanks me for teaching him. He loves to tell me about a good grade that he got that day, and tell me that I am the best teacher. Needless to say, that makes my day!:-) Nayef still needs another year in our B and C Newcomer classes before he can thrive in our general population. He will be successful if we do our part.

Waseem is an 8th grader about 6 ft tall. He is seen as a pushy kid. Not a bully but pushy, he can be a bull in a china shop. He came to the USA with no English, not even his letters or numbers. I have not seen his amazing level of motivation in my 34 years of teaching. After only three months, he is reading at a second grade level and speaks like a typical student might after 1 1/2 years in the USA. He is very outgoing and charismatic as well, to a fault. He almost harasses us to teach him faster. It can be really annoying. He has approached me regularly to say "Thank you, thank you, thank you Mr. Plumb. You have taught me so much and I am going to do great things here in America!" His expressions of extreme gratitude have left me feeling fulfilled but maybe a little overwhelmed or even embarrassed at times.

Last evening I met Waseem and his family at the bay for the first time. They were on a family outing. It was obvious that Waseem was in charge. He proudly introduced me to his father who is completely blind, his 8 year old sister who is the size of a 4 year old and severely vision impaired, and his mother who looks to him as the head of household. He is the man of the family! I will be an outspoken advocate for Waseem and his family!



Middle Eastern student giving a TED Talk on the refugee crisis

Shannon Churchill
Emerald Middle School

Maya moved to El Cajon from Baghdad five months ago. She lives with her mom, dad, two brothers and sister. In so many ways she's like any typical seventh grade girl. She loves reading, hanging out with her friends and listening to music. What sets her apart from most of the other kids her age is her unbelievable drive and passion for learning. The effort, precision and care she puts into her work is admirable. In just the short time she has been in the United States, she has learned to speak, read and write in English. She is always the first to complete her assignments and is constantly requesting extra work to do. On numerous occasions, she has talked about her dream of becoming a doctor. Her attitude and optimism is infectious. It is an absolute privilege to call her my student. With her attitude and her ability to overcome adversity, she is going to accomplish anything she sets her mind to.

Melanie Ellis

Hillsdale Middle School

I am filled with sadness and worry for Cajon Valley students who are new to our country. This year I have a student named Milad. He came from Syria last spring with his family. Milad is in my eighth grade English class, and he tries very hard to learn all he can. Almost every morning, Milad comes to see me about a half an hour before school starts, and we discuss what he doesn't understand. For instance, we are reading *The Giver* in class, and although he picks up a little by listening to our discussions, he needs a lot of clarification given the advanced concepts Lowry discusses in the novel. I have searched high and low for editions in Arabic—I even contacted Lois Lowry herself. Through her return message, I tracked down a publisher in Egypt that has a couple copies—but since we are almost done with the unit, the copies I will order will not help Milad this year. By using Google Translate and by breaking things down in English, he gets the gist. He is a quick learner and he can apply our discussions to the work related to the novel.

Milad is an amazing kid—his effort and desire to succeed is unparalleled. When I had the pleasure of visiting with Milad and his family in their home as a part of the Cajon Valley Home Visit program, I experienced one of the most profound moments in the 22 years I have been teaching. His father started weeping and wrapped his arms around his son, kissing his head. Milad's parents hope to see Milad become a doctor, and I have no doubt that this young man can achieve this or anything else to which he sets his mind. To see this family, so happy to be in this country, so happy to have their child succeed and so grateful for CVUSD helping him to have the potential to lead a wonderful life—well, it was absolutely beautiful. I wish the world could know Milad. I wish everyone could see his goodness.

Recently, I think about Milad all the time, and I wonder about how his family feels. I haven't discussed it with him directly for many reasons: a fear of political backlash from the community, maintenance of professional boundaries and frankly, shame that our country is acting against

people that come from Milad's country. Instead, I am doing what I can—meeting him at the door each morning and helping him to be the best he can be and showing him that not all of America shares those views.

Mary Hizon-Barry

Cajon Valley Middle School

I have many wonderful stories from my newcomer class at Cajon Valley Middle School. Here are just a couple:

One student, when asked to compare his current school to his old one in Afghanistan... his answer was chairs. He used to sit on the ground to go to school and loves that we have chairs. He also likes that we get to come every day because there isn't fighting keeping him from going to school each day.

In a unit discussing the rights and freedoms in America, multiple students said they didn't feel like they had a voice or that anyone listened to them in their country. Because we have the right to vote, they feel like the people running the country are looking to help them.

Multiple parents have said that their kids feel safe and are able to be kids, and play outside. This makes them very thankful for being in America.

One student comes every day into the after school tutoring center because she didn't go to school in her home country. She started her schooling with us in middle school so she is behind. But she works hard each day by coming to the library for extra support.

One student asked to take our reading books home because he wanted to learn to read. He never learned to read in his native language of Farsi, so he was learning to read for the very first time. As of last week, he was able to read the whole book to me on his own because he said he practiced at home all the time.

Three brothers from the Congo had never been in school or used a computer before. I taught them how to scroll, click, etc. They didn't ever want to go home and often stayed with me after school voluntarily just to get extra practice.

Jessica Harnett

Lexington Elementary School

We have two Syrian students in our Kindergarten class that have brought so much joy and life to our room. The first young girl arrived when school began. She cried every morning for two weeks until she was able to receive our warmth and genuine interest. I watched her “turn around” when I wrote her name in yellow highlighter and gestured that she trace it. Rawan is her name. Then I said, “Arabic. Rawan in Arabic,” and gestured for her hand to write her name. She wrote it, and I traced her name in pencil, right to left, as she had done before. She was so lifted in being recognized on such a personal level. It was her first smile, and now she doesn’t stop. She hugs, she smiles, she loves, she draws, she counts, she skips, she says her ABC’s, and she’s become the life of our room each day.

Next came Halaz. She was brought over to me while I was on recess duty with loud, playing kids everywhere. The vice principal gave me her hand, and she said, “No,” with swollen, big red tearful eyes. The bell rang and our students got in line. We walked back into the room, and that’s when Halaz saw Rawan. She knew Rawan and suddenly felt safe, but still not happy. Neither child spoke English, but they had each other to speak Arabic. It took weeks for the girls to settle, but now our room wouldn’t be anything like it is today if it were not for these two little academics. They are enthusiastic. They are sweetly competitive – with good reason! They love the ChromeBooks, the garden, Writing, Math, ELA, ELD, library, P.E, and lunchtime. Rawan and Halaz both won our class Academic Achievement Awards for most progress made in the classroom. I feel that I know these children deeply, despite the initial language barrier. Their parents, brothers, and family members are very warm and endearing as well.

Mary Reed

Johnson Elementary School

El Cajon California, where I work, is the one of the largest U.S. communities of Iraqi immigrants and refugees, both Christian and Muslim. They help each other, and support their common cause of providing their children with a better future than what is available in their homelands.

More recently, we have seen an increase in Syrian refugees. These children, as the Iraqi refugees before them, have seen more in their short lifetimes than we can imagine. Like Laith, a third grader, who screamed each morning upon being separated from his mother, out of fear of losing her forever, a fear not unfounded in reality. Laith was witness to horrific acts of death and mayhem before making it here. He needs love and compassion, as Jesus teaches us.

Or Bashar, who though much less traumatized, had missed so much of his childhood, that upon arriving here as a third grader started acting like a toddler, putting everything in his mouth, touching everything, shouting out. But now, a short year later, with love and compassion from the school staff, he acts like a fourth grader, and is on his way to being a bright and dynamic member of our community.

They are resettled here by Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and secular organizations. They come here because Lady Liberty has beckoned them. They come here because we are a nation of immigrants. They come here because we are a people of hope, love, compassion and inclusion.

Teacher Debra

Madison Avenue Elementary School

I keep thinking about what Saif’s dad told me while we were making gingerbread houses. He said how he thought it was so wonderful that we did this great thing for the kids. Because to me it seems like such a small thing, it really made me stop and think about how everyone’s perception is different. I got emotional!

Meaghan Becker

Johnson Elementary School

Oncil is a kindergartener. I'm unsure of how much he remembers from Syria as his family has already been in the U.S. for about a year now. Nevertheless, it's obvious that at 5 years old, he has the wonderment of a toddler-constantly exploring things because the world (or this side of the world) is incredibly NEW to him. In his first several weeks, he would frequently run out of our line or wander around the room aimlessly, eat inedible items, and smuggle classroom supplies in his pockets any chance he could get. He would do cartwheels on our carpet, and never seemed to answer the first time I said his name. He can climb most anything and is faster than me most days. He even climbed into our classroom sink trying to bathe. He arrives at school clean, but he loved wetting his hair, and cooling off during our hot desert days.

Little by little, Oncil started tuning in to what we were doing. His English is still limited, but he can give greetings unprompted and loves to participate in our daily calendar. He frequently recites what month we are in and what our weather is like that day. His favorite response? "Sunny"! I can't tell you how much my heart sings when I hear him say "Goodbye Miss Becker!" when he leaves each day. He loves saying goodbye to his friends and creating secret handshakes or high-fives with them, all in his own kid language. His laugh is infectious as is his creativity, and he is everyone's friend.

One story will always stand out in my mind. One mom came to me with concerns because Oncil had been bothering her son. One day, she came to pick up her son and she saw for herself. Her reaction was unexpected though. While Oncil comes to school clean, his clothing was obviously heavily used. She immediately messaged me saying she felt strongly about helping Oncil. The next day, she came to my room with 4 huge garbage bags full of clothing

and shoes for Oncil and his siblings. I'll never forget the look of pride on Oncil's face as he walked in the next day with clothes that- while worn prior- were in much better shape, and so much more colorful and newer-looking than what he was wearing previously.

Oncil is a welcome addition to our classroom community and to our school. His story is an incredible one, one he may not even remember in his older years. But I will always remember the precocious little boy who moved across the globe and started a new life in the Cajon Valley. I, his classmates, and the people he touches at school, are so glad he is here.



Newcomer kindergarten students

Miss Kolerich

W.D. Hall Elementary School

Athraa came to W.D. Hall from Syria in December 2016. She was shy and anxious when she first started. Things like recess were completely new to her. Her anxiety caused her to withdraw from other students, and she would scratch at her hands and arms. However, in just two short months, she has made friends and her anxiety has lessened to the point that she no longer scratches. She participates in class and raises her hand to participate often. She has also been learning new games at recess and P.E. and is quite fond of baseball! Other students, including some who have been refugees themselves, have enjoyed teaching Athraa about different things around school and she has enjoyed sharing short tidbits of where she is from with other students and teachers. I'm so proud of how far she has come and am excited to continue to watch her grow!



Students dancing Mexican folklórico

Christine Sphar

Madison Avenue Elementary School

We had a newcomer 3 years ago who arrived during spring trimester of 4th grade. Her attitude about the entire move was poor. It was obvious that Nour was a capable child, and her lovely parents assured us that she excelled in school in Iraq. They made sure to share that her grandmother was a school teacher there. We struggled with Nour that whole trimester. She did not want to try. She did not want to speak English. She did not want to smile. She did not want to be here.

Her parents checked out textbooks from us to help her at home, and we were very concerned.

Knowing all this, we set up a meeting with the family early in her 5th grade year. We also invited a specific district translator, one who was a student in this district and is now pursuing a biology degree at San Diego State. We began the meeting as a normal parent meeting, introducing the parents to the new

teacher, Debbie McCallister, and hearing about the child's educational and family history. But then we turned the meeting over to the translator.

We asked her (Saba Al Jawad) to tell the girl a little about her own history and about what she has seen in schools. She shared that learning English does take time, and that Nour will make mistakes, but that mistakes help us grow. Saba talked about the hard work she had to put in, but how that hard work has paid off, putting her at the top of her class.

Nour listened, grudgingly. Change came slowly, but by the end of her 5th grade year, she was growing and enjoying school. She left elementary school with a new confidence and better English skills. This year, as a 7th grader at Montgomery Middle School, Nour comes back to visit us often. Her smile lights up the playground, and she says, with pride, "I speak English perfectly now!"

Debbie McCallister

Madison Avenue Elementary School

My student, Savio, is a newcomer from Iraq who started in my class just before winter break. He had no English. He is understandably shy.

I sat him near my Arabic speaking girls so they could help me communicate with him. He also shared a table with Luke, a student who is native born and an English speaker. Luke joined my class around the end of October from National City. Luke is a struggling student who is far below grade level in reading and in math.

Luke and Savio became friends. Savio joins whatever Luke plays at recess, and they sit together at lunch.

Last week when the kids were working on their science projects, the two boys came up to me, very excited. Luke told me Savio wanted to tell me something. Savio said, "Hello, Mrs. McCallister." Luke very proudly told me he had taught Savio to say that. They both beamed, and I had one of those teary moments when I love my students so much. I congratulated them both, one for learning and one for teaching, and both of them for being such a good friend to the other. Luke went on to tell me that he is teaching Savio many other words, and that Savio knows a lot of words now. I told him that's how it happens and thanked him some more.

I don't need to tell an educator how touched I am. Obviously, Savio is getting a lot of instruction in English from a variety of sources. But none of them is as precious as the lessons from his friend. These two enriched each other's lives in ways they don't even understand. I love teaching in a diverse environment. I wouldn't trade it for anything.



“Obviously, Savio is getting a lot of instruction in English from a variety of sources. But none of them is as precious as the lessons from his friend. These two enriched each other's lives in ways they don't even understand. I love teaching in a diverse environment. I wouldn't trade it for anything.”

Years ago I heard a story of a mother who had multiple children and was asked the question, “which one do you love the most”? Her answer was, “the one who needs me the most”. At the time I was a young mother with four children and I thought it was an exceptionally silly story. I remember thinking that even when I spent the night in the hospital with a sick child, I was still worried about the other three at home. I have thought of that story often when I have walked classrooms in our school district. Strategizing and planning the path to the best outcomes for the students that sometimes need us the most.

I remember well the first moment I walked into a middle school newcomer classroom. It was filled with children who had very recently immigrated to the USA. They quieted respectfully when we entered but there were still murmurs in Arabic. The most outstanding thing about that classroom was the feeling of peace, trust, and transparency in the room. It was something that took you by surprise as you entered a middle school classroom. The students in that classroom had an almost tangible desire to learn. We use the cliché phrase “sponges” far too often but I felt that these students really were “sponges”. They were pouring over beginner reader picture books with visible appetite. Their one focus was obvious: to become Americans. Honestly, I don’t know that I have ever felt so proud or so committed to a group of young students.

Their stories are varied but with careful and thoughtful focus they will all have the same ending; they will become productive citizens in our country. They will write the next great play, sing the national anthem, discover cures, become entrepreneurs and build a future with all of our children. They come with hearts full of gratitude for their deliverance, and a promise to give back. Ask them; and you hear that story again and again.

As a School Board Member I feel both a duty and a privilege to serve where they live. They have motivated me to be better in my service, they have inspired me to look beyond our ever shrinking world to see possibility. I am extremely proud to be part of a district that has actively sought to support these children with the resources available to us and within the scope of our abilities. I know that we could do more, and I sincerely hope that in the future we have the revenue to do so.

Tamara Otero

Governing Board Member

Cajon Valley Union School District

 **@oterotamara**

**“All you need is Love...
...Love is all you need”
~ John Lennon**

In these stories and in our Cajon Valley classrooms the common theme is “Love”. We feel so fortunate to be the first Americans to welcome these beautiful children to their new home, community, and country. These wonderful vignettes our teachers took the time to share with you are just a small sample of the wonder, joy, excitement... and oh yes “Love” that our students are welcomed with every day in their schools. I’m inspired by the passion our teachers have for learning but even more blown away by the love they have for children. All children!

This calendar year we’ve welcomed almost one thousand new refugee students fleeing war and persecution... most of whom speak little or no English. Some of our students arrive having never set foot in a school or classroom. But when they can’t tell you what they are thinking or how they are feeling with words, they speak with their eyes, their hugs, their smiles... and sometimes their tears. We haven’t walked a mile, or even two feet, in their shoes but after just a few weeks you’d think we’ve known them forever.

There is so much we hope they learn from us in the short time we have them as students. What I think that surprised us all is just how much we’ve learned from them. If every community enjoyed the rich diversity we have here in Cajon Valley, I think the world would truly be a better place.

Our goal is to make Cajon Valley the very best place to live, work, play, and raise a family. In order to make this a reality for all families, we’ll need adequate resources and support. Please join us in creating paths to fulfill more great American dreams.

David Miyashiro, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Cajon Valley Union School District

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