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Sierra School Receives State Civic Learning Award

On Friday, April 6, Sierra School became one of 65 California schools to be honored with the Civic Learning Award of Merit from the State of California’s Chief Justice and Superintendent of Public Instruction. The award recognizes Sierra School for their partnership with El Dorado County’s Office of the District Attorney, Superior Court, Sheriff’s and Probation Departments along with Placerville Police Department through Project LEAD (Legal Enrichment and Decision-Making). Project LEAD brings the courtroom into the classroom where students learn about the legal system, a variety of professions and how to make good decisions.

Sierra School Principal Patricia Horn stated, “I am beyond honored to be able to receive this award on behalf of Sierra School. However, the real honor goes to Lydia Stuart and Kassie Cardullo from the District Attorney’s Office and Mrs. Mara Maciel, Mrs. Joan Day and Mrs. Erin Leus who coordinate and teach all of the lessons.” She went on to express, “Without our partners from the District Attorney’s Office and their tireless commitment to coming to classrooms every week, as well as the teachers who prepare and guide the students, the program would not have the life-changing effects that it does.”

The award was presented by Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court, the Honorable Judge Suzanne Kingsbury, who addressed students during the ceremony, “Congratulations and I hope you learned a lot about the law and how to make good choices.”

Over the past three years, District Attorney Vern Pierson has teamed up with Sierra School for multiple rounds of Project LEAD—an innovative approach to crime prevention that teaches children that the choices they make today can affect their lives forever. Through Project LEAD, prosecutors from the District Attorney’s Office visit fifth-grade students at Sierra School once a week to provide an introduction to the criminal justice system and to promote positive decision-making skills.

The hour-long lessons focus on the legal and social consequences of juvenile crimes such as truancy, illicit drug use, shoplifting, and graffiti. Students engage in group discussions and role-playing scenarios to become acquainted with common pressures that lead to delinquent conduct and to practice refusal skills to deter criminal activity. Project LEAD culminates in a mock trial held at the El Dorado County Superior Court in Placerville. The trial—conducted entirely by students who play the role of the judge, prosecutors, defense attorneys and courtroom staff—introduces hallmark concepts of justice such as the right to counsel and proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

During the award presentation assembly, District Attorney Pierson asked the students about their favorite learning experiences through Project LEAD. Answers included visiting the courtroom and learning about the legal system, cyber-bullying, law enforcement and more. District Attorney Pierson further noted, “I cherish this program because it gives you an enriching experience while you learn about how the consequences of your actions can affect your entire lives.”

County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ed Manansala also attended the ceremony and expressed, “We strive to prepare all students for college, career, and civic engagement. Sierra School is a model for fostering civic leadership.”

For more information about Sierra School, visit [www.pusdk8.us/o/sierra](http://www.pusdk8.us/o/sierra)

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*Pictured (left to right): Lydia Stuart (Deputy District Attorney), Jim Ortega (Chief of Police), Dr. Ed Manansala (County Superintendent of Schools), Kassie Cardullo (Deputy District Attorney), Patricia Horn (Sierra School Principal), Honorable Judge Suzanne Kingsbury, Eric Bonniksen (Placerville Union School District Superintendent), District Attorney Vern Pierson*

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*District Attorney Vern Pierson discusses the Project LEAD program with Sierra School students at the Civic Learning Award of Merit presentation assembly.*

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