


## Board Agenda Item

TO: Air Pollution Control District Board

FROM: Aeron Arlin Genet, Air Pollution Control Officer 

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SUBJECT: Update on the Clean Air Ambassadors Program

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### RECOMMENDATION:

Receive and file an update on the District's Clean Air Ambassadors program.

### BACKGROUND:

The District's Clean Air Ambassadors program launched in Spring 2019 to bring local undergraduate college students to classrooms across Santa Barbara County to deliver lessons featuring air quality-focused curriculum to kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Based on a successful model operated by the San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District, our District's free program has grown to offer three engaging lessons tailored to each grade level to effectively teach students about the importance of air pollution and ways we can protect our air. District staff, along with the Clean Air Ambassadors (Ambassadors), designed the program to align with the Next Generation Science Standards, which appeals to teachers and benefits students.

### DISCUSSION:

#### *Program Implementation*

The Clean Air Ambassadors program was launched with four Ambassadors, consisting of undergraduate students from University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) and Santa Barbara City College (SBCC). District staff worked closely with the Ambassadors to develop two lesson plans in the beginning phase of the program, and then developed a third lesson plan to expand the program in the 2024-2025 school year. The Ambassadors utilized resources and lesson plans used by other agencies as a basis to create their own unique curriculum. Clean Air Ambassadors

are trained to present innovative, interactive curriculum and their lessons explore concepts such as air pollution and sustainability to promote environmental literacy.

The first lesson features Dr. Seuss' book "The Lorax" which demonstrates how air pollution affects people and the environment. As part of the lesson, the Ambassadors teach students about sources of air pollution and the personal actions to help keep our air clean. The reading of "The Lorax" incorporates activities and props related to the story. The second lesson uses the short story "The Magic School Bus" by Joanna Cole to teach students how air pollution affects human health and how children are more sensitive to air pollution than adults. As part of a pretend school bus ride around the classroom, students conduct an experiment to learn how air filters work and play air-themed games. The third lesson features a story developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency titled "Why is Coco Orange?" to teach students about particulate matter and ozone, as well as how to interpret the Air Quality Index scale to learn how to protect themselves from air pollution.

Through direct outreach to teachers at elementary schools, the Ambassadors presented the first lessons in April 2019 to three kindergarten classes and one transitional-kindergarten class at Hollister Elementary School in Goleta. The presentations earned enthusiastic reviews from the teachers, and the Ambassadors were invited to return the following school year. Soon after the launch of the program, the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly halted classroom visits until the 2021-2022 school year. As elementary schools navigated the transition from online to in-person instruction post-pandemic, the Clean Air Ambassadors team remained dedicated to the program and prepared their return to classrooms by conducting outreach to new teachers.

The program relies on direct outreach, recommendations, and requests from teachers for classroom visits. Since the launch of the program, the Ambassadors have received 62 requests from local teachers to visit their classrooms. Once the lessons are completed, the Ambassadors provide teachers with a thank you note and an online survey to gather feedback on the program and curriculum, opportunities for improvement, and gauge their interest in having Clean Air Ambassadors return to their classrooms. The direct and word-of-mouth outreach have generated significant interest in the program at schools across the County. Additional information, and a link to request a classroom visit can be found at [ourair.org/clean-air-ambassadors-program](http://ourair.org/clean-air-ambassadors-program).

### ***Program Successes***

The 2023-2024 school year was the most successful year for the Clean Air Ambassadors program since its launch in 2019, with Ambassadors reaching 14 elementary schools, 41 classrooms, and approximately 900 Kindergarten - 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students across Santa Barbara County, as shown in Table 1 below. The success of the program can be attributed to building relationships with local teachers and elementary schools, growing the Ambassadors team to increase capacity for classroom visits to additional schools countywide, and creating the Lead Clean Air Ambassador position.

Since the launch of the program, Clean Air Ambassadors have built successful partnerships with local teachers, resulting in invitations to participate in Science Nights and Walk, Bike, and Roll to School events. At Science Nights, Ambassadors and District interns collaborate to engage with students and their families about the importance of air quality through arts and crafts, a do-

it-yourself air purifier demonstration, and providing resources on how to set up a “Clean Air Room.” In Fall 2024, the District supported Vieja Valley Elementary School’s application to the Coalition for Clean Air’s California Clean Air Day microgrant for a Walk, Bike, and Roll to School event on October 2, 2024. Brandon Elementary also received a microgrant for a Walk, Bike, and Roll event on Clean Air Day. At these events, Ambassadors encouraged students to take the Clean Air Pledge, discussed what actions they can take to protect our air, and gave out reflective snap bracelets for students to wear when walking, biking, or rolling to school to increase visibility and promote the Safe Routes to School initiative.

Despite all the success of the Clean Air Ambassadors, one ongoing challenge to manage the program is the continual turnover of participating undergraduate students. For the program to be successful, it’s critical to recruit undergraduate students with genuine passion and experience working with elementary-school children. In Fall 2023, District staff successfully recruited five (5) UCSB undergraduate students to grow the team to a total of seven (7) Clean Air Ambassadors. The new hires adapted quickly by shadowing the experienced Ambassadors to learn how to effectively engage students, manage a classroom, and lead the interactive lessons. To prepare for two (2) Ambassadors graduating in Spring 2024 and an additional two (2) studying abroad in Fall 2024, District staff conducted an additional recruitment in Spring 2024 and hired four (4) undergraduate students, including two (2) bilingual students fluent in English and Spanish.

With a larger team, the Ambassadors have additional capacity to help grow the program to reach more elementary schools countywide. Out of the 41 classrooms visited during the 2023-2024 school year, the Ambassadors reached one (1) classroom in Gaviota, four (4) classrooms in Lompoc, three (3) classrooms in Buellton, and eight (8) classrooms in Santa Maria. Due to the increased travel time from South County to schools located in the Santa Ynez Valley and North County, Ambassadors intentionally schedule multiple classrooms visits each day to maximum their time and effort, as well as the number of students reached. As the program continues to grow, the District’s goal is to expand the reach of the Clean Air Ambassadors program by visiting new schools across the County and increasing access to the air quality focused curriculum.

**Table 1 – Clean Air Ambassadors 2023-2024 School Year Statistics**

Elementary School	Location	# of Classrooms Visited	Grade Level(s)	# of Students (approx.)
Oak Valley Elementary	Buellton	3	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup>	63
Vista De Las Cruces	Gaviota	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	16
Ellwood Elementary	Goleta	4 & <u>Science Night</u>	K, 1 <sup>st</sup>	73
Hollister Elementary	Goleta	2 & <u>Science Night</u>	1 <sup>st</sup>	43
Hapgood Elementary	Lompoc	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	25
La Honda STEAM Academy	Lompoc	3	2 <sup>nd</sup>	72
Adams Elementary	Santa Barbara	6	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup>	114
Foothill Elementary	Santa Barbara	1	K	23

Monroe Elementary	Santa Barbara	4	K, 1 <sup>st</sup>	78
Mountainview Elementary	Santa Barbara	2 & <u>Science Night</u>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	50
Vieja Valley Elementary	Santa Barbara	2 & <u>Science Night</u>	1 <sup>st</sup>	50
Washington Elementary	Santa Barbara	3	K, 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup>	82
Alvin Elementary	Santa Maria	5	3 <sup>rd</sup>	145
Blochman Elementary	Santa Maria	3	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup>	62
<b>2023-2024 School Year Totals:</b>				
<b>14 Schools</b>	<b>1 Buellton 1 Gaviota 2 Goleta 2 Lompoc 6 Santa Barbara 2 Santa Maria</b>	<b>41 Classrooms 4 Science Nights</b>	<b>6 Kindergarten 14 1<sup>st</sup> grade 11 2<sup>nd</sup> grade 10 3<sup>rd</sup> grade</b>	<b>896 Students</b>

In December 2023, the Lead Clean Air Ambassador position was created to provide an existing Ambassador with opportunities to assist District staff in managing the program. Responsibilities of the Lead Clean Air Ambassador include serving as a liaison between the Ambassadors team and District staff, leading curriculum development efforts, scheduling classroom visits and other educational events, and monitoring classroom supplies and props. The Lead Clean Air Ambassador position has positively impacted the program by improving communication between the Ambassadors team and District staff, increasing the number of classroom visits, and providing the Ambassadors with professional development and leadership opportunities.

The goal of the program for school year 2024-2025 is to extend the reach to schools countywide by 15% (i.e., 16 schools total), increase total students reached by 15% (i.e., approximately 1,000 total), and expand resources for Spanish speaking children.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The costs for the Clean Air Ambassadors program are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 budget approved by your Board. There are no additional fiscal impacts.