

CONFERENCE

Connections

Gold Medal Educators

A month ago, as the world turned its attention to International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry closing the Winter Games in Milan, her words lingered long after the flame dimmed:

“My fellow Olympians, you have been incredible—each and every one of you. Brave. Fearless. Full of heart and passion.... You gave everything—and you shared it with us. This is the true Olympic spirit: competing, embracing, lifting each other up, whatever the result. You showed us what excellence, respect, and friendship look like in a world that often forgets these values.”

The Olympic Games are emotional magnets. They draw us in with stories of discipline and determination unfolding in real time. We witness sacrifice, setbacks, and stunning triumphs. We celebrate the visible medals—but we are moved by the invisible work behind them.

And I feel that same stirring when I step into our SECC schools.

The achievements may not be televised, and no podium waits at the end of the day, but what happens inside classrooms is no less extraordinary.

Beyond academic growth, there is spiritual formation. Beyond test scores, there is resilience. There are relationships built, confidence restored, character shaped. There is careful instruction paired with steady emotional support.

Today's educators are the unsung heroes.

To be a school educator—whether administrator or teacher—is complex work. It is layered. It is relentless. In a single day, often within a single hour, educators juggle culture and climate, student achievement, safety and security, parent communication, student discipline, staffing challenges, assessment data, and community expectations. The role demands strategic thinking and operational precision. It requires instructional leadership and emotional regulation. It calls for compassion under pressure and clarity in chaos.

At their best, teachers evoke the same warm sense of inspiration we feel while watching elite athletes compete. There is something deeply human about witnessing someone give their all for the good of others.

If classroom educators were awarded Olympic medals, they would sweep the podium.

Gold for patience. Gold for problem-solving. Gold for resilience and dedication. Gold for creativity, composure, and conflict management. Gold for the unseen sacrifices made for families and students alike.

A day in the classroom can feel like a slalom race—fast, technical, unpredictable. There are sudden bumps. Unexpected turns. Moments that throw even the most seasoned professional off balance. Yet somehow, educators adjust mid-course. They lean in. They recalibrate. And more often than not, they stick the landing.

In a world that can feel divided and distracted, schools remain places where excellence, respect, and friendship are taught not as slogans but as daily practice. Teachers model what perseverance looks like. They demonstrate grace under pressure. They lift others up, regardless of the score.

The Olympic spirit lives in stadiums every two years. It lives in classrooms every single day.



Datha Tickner
SECC Superintendent of Schools

Elissa Kido and Dan Kido share firsthand accounts at the Japanese American Museum in Los Angeles.



The Blessing of Partnership in Christian Education



At Valley Adventist Christian School (VACS), a small school of just 30 students, a meaningful partnership demonstrates how God multiplies blessings. For the past five years, Elissa Kido, Director of the Center for Research on K-12 Adventist Education (CRAE) at La Sierra University, and Martie Parsley, retired speech professor, have volunteered weekly to teach writing and speech. Their mentorship has strengthened academics while building confidence, critical thinking, and communication skills through caring, intergenerational relationships rooted in faith.

Students have also enjoyed enriching field experiences, including a guided tour of the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology and a private tour of the new Loma Linda University Medical Center. These hands-on opportunities brought learning to life and inspired interest in future careers, particularly in healthcare.

Through dedicated coaching, junior high students now deliver polished, confident speeches. This partnership reflects the heart of Christian education—academic excellence grounded in service, mentorship, and a commitment to uplifting the next generation.

By Ester Oyoyo



LEFT: Kido and Oyoyo take a photo with the seventh- and eighth-grade writing class. ABOVE: Adrian Cotton explains how the innovative seismic safety system allows the entire hospital building to "float" during an earthquake.



MGA science teacher Andrae Chambers explains to a student how to program the prosthetic hand.

Purpose-Driven Innovation at MGA

Students at Mesa Grande Academy (MGA) are designing a prosthetic hand that can truly sense and respond, restoring not just movement but dignity to those who have lost a hand. At the same time, another team is developing a redesigned back brace aimed at increasing comfort, mobility, and long-term healing. These aren't just engineering exercises. Before sketches become schematics and prototypes become products, students pause to pray over their designs—asking for wisdom, compassion, and the ability to create solutions that genuinely serve others.

What makes this story even more powerful is where it begins. MGA's LEGO Robotics program isn't just about competitions or coding challenges. It is intentionally built as a foundation. It teaches problem-solving, teamwork, precision, and perseverance—skills that grow into real-world innovation like advanced prosthetics and medical devices. Students who once programmed LEGO robots are now applying those same principles to life-changing technologies.

From a small Seventh-day Adventist school community, big ideas are taking shape. These students are proving that faith and science are not opposing forces. Instead, they are partners on purpose. With hearts grounded in service and minds trained in innovation, the school is working to better humanity, one design at a time.

By Ashley Pettit



A student discusses the back brace with Andrae Chambers.



Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

11330 Pierce Street
Riverside, CA 92505
951-509-2200

www.seccadventist.org

Jonathan Park • President
Patty Marruffo • Secretary
Verlon Strauss • Treasurer

Conference Connections

Taji Saleem, Editor

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The Light in Lily's Backpack

Lily liked school, but one morning she asked herself why learning was so important. As she packed her backpack, her mom reminded her: "God uses what we learn to help us care for others."

At school, Lily practiced reading and helped her friend Sam sound out a tricky word. In math, she figured out a problem and explained it to her table. Later, her teacher shared a Bible verse: "Teach me Your ways, Lord." Lily realized that learning wasn't just about schoolwork, it was about growing into who God made her to be.

That night, Lily thanked God for her teachers and the chance to learn. She knew that every lesson was preparing her to serve, lead, and show God's love in simple, everyday ways.

By Jordyn Wright



ISPY: Learning All Around

Look carefully through this image and try to find the hidden items. Take your time, have fun, and count as you go!

- 2 apples
- 1 flower
- 3 hearts
- 6 yellow stars



Answer Key