

# PRESS RELEASE

## **Manhattan Beach Unified School District**

325 South Peck Avenue  
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Carolyn Seaton, Executive Director, Educational Services  
Manhattan Beach Unified School District  
310-318-7345 ext.5989

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **MBUSD TEACHER OF THE YEAR LINDA OKUMURA HONORED AS ONE OF THE 2011-2012 L.A. COUNTY TEACHERS OF THE YEAR**

**Manhattan Beach, CA, September 26, 2011**

Pacific Elementary School's **Linda Okumura** was honored on Friday, September 23, as one of sixteen total winners distinguished as the 2011-2012 Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year, representing the profession's "best of the best" in the state's largest honors competition for K-12 educators. At a morning ceremony, the "Sweet 16" were revealed by Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Arturo Delgado as outstanding educators who have been serving with praiseworthy distinction. Judged by a panel of peers as the county's top public school teachers for this academic year, they will serve as standard-bearers for the teaching profession and their 80,000 classroom colleagues countywide.

Linda Okumura began her teaching career at Heliotrope Elementary School in the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1977 after completing her Bachelor of Science and preliminary teaching credential at USC. At Heliotrope she taught first grade and a third/fourth grade combination class. After four years with LAUSD, she joined the Lancaster School District where she again taught a third/fourth combination class. In 1987, Mrs. Okumura joined the faculty at the Antelope Valley College and taught classes focused on child development such as "The Child in Family/Community Relationships," "Child and Adolescent Development," and "Creative Experiences for Children." She also became the Program Director for a mentoring project at Antelope Valley College through which she mentored first generation junior and high school students toward a college degree by providing college tours, tutoring, workshops, and lectures to facilitate their path to college success.

Linda and her husband Donn moved to Redondo Beach in the early 1990s, and soon after she began offering parent participation classes at Sand Tots Preschool and South Bay Adult School. She was hired at Pacific Elementary School in 1992 as a first grade teacher and has remained there ever since. Starting with her first year at Pacific, Mrs. Okumura has invited each parent into the classroom to present a "Parents As Partners" lesson and has visited each student at home during his/her time to be "Star of the Week." Her own fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Davis, made home visits, and Mrs. Okumura remembers how special that time with her teacher made her feel as a student. She says that her life and her teaching have been greatly enriched by these visits to each child's home. She enjoys collaborating with her grade level colleagues on a daily basis and is often spotted in her classroom early in the morning, late in the evening, and on weekends preparing her lessons and her classroom for her students' next exciting adventure in learning.

When asked to reflect on her philosophy of education, Mrs. Okumura stated, "Real learning comes from within the learner; it is not teacher-directed, but teacher-inspired." She added, "I believe that

teaching is both an art and a science. Effective strategies, authentic assessments, and differentiated instruction should be infused with humor, intuition, and just the right amount of sparkle.” She noted that after a career that has spanned 34 years, she appreciates all of the experiences she has had that contributed to who she is as an educator today. “I feel so fortunate to be part of such a dynamic profession,” shared Okumura, “one that brings new changes and challenges each year. I will continue to grow and learn, but I also hope to leave a trail.”

Before she earned L.A. County Teacher of the Year status, Mrs. Okumura participated in the rigorous Manhattan Beach Unified School District Teacher of the Year process. After being named as Pacific Elementary School’s top educator, she and the Teachers of the Year from the other six MBUSD school sites were observed and interviewed by a committee of eight individuals comprised of teachers and administrators representing different levels and disciplines. The district committee had the daunting task of selecting the one teacher out of a field of exceptionally talented educators who would represent Manhattan Beach at the county level. “While all of the site Teachers of the Year were outstanding, Linda Okumura stood out because of the remarkably high level of engagement and independence her students displayed during the lesson observation, as well as her ability to articulate her personal philosophy of teaching during the interview,” stated Carolyn Seaton, MBUSD’s Executive Director of Educational Services.

After earning the honor of MBUSD Teacher of the Year in the spring, Mrs. Okumura embarked on the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s (LACOE’s) Teacher of the Year process that included being interviewed by a panel and submitting essays, lesson plans, and other materials to judging panels comprised of peers from across the county. When she was notified by Los Angeles County Office of Education officials that she was being considered for the honor of L.A. County Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Okumura stated, “If I were chosen as one of the sixteen finalists for L.A. County Teacher of the Year, it would be a tremendous honor. To represent a profession of hard-working colleagues to me is such a responsibility as well. I enjoy teaching so much; it is such a fulfilling career. To all aspiring teachers and new teachers, I think you are choosing a profession that will give you endless fulfillment.”

When asked about Linda Okumura, MBUSD Superintendent Dr. Michael Matthews affirmed, “She exemplifies the very best in this profession of public education. She knows that every day in her first grade classroom is a precious opportunity to provide students with a foundation of knowledge and skills that is essential to their future academic success.”

Principal Kim Linz also praised Mrs. Okumura. “Linda is an inspiration to students - always challenging them as individuals to stretch the limits of their academic capabilities. She is a master at engaging students and discovering ways to bring the outside world into her first grade classroom.”

Mrs. Okumura and the other fifteen L.A. County winners will automatically advance with other county finalists from across the state to the California Teachers of the Year competition this fall, with a chance from there to compete in the National Teacher of the Year contest next spring.

### **About the Manhattan Beach Unified School District**

Manhattan Beach Unified School District ranks as the third highest performing unified school district in the State of California with a 2011 Growth Academic Performance Index (API) of 932. MBUSD serves nearly 7,000 students from preschool to twelfth grade at eight school campuses—one preschool, five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Mira Costa High School’s API of 911 places it in the top 1.3% of public high schools in California, and it was named number fifteen in ESPN’s “Fab 50” High Schools in the Unified States in 2010 for its superior athletic programs. In addition to outstanding students and excellent teachers, MBUSD is extremely fortunate to have a high level of parental involvement in the schools and very strong partnerships with the Manhattan Beach Education and Athletic Foundations, the City of Manhattan Beach, Chevron, Northrop Grumman, Continental Development, the Manhattan Beach Chamber of Commerce and other local organizations and businesses. More information about MBUSD is available at [www.mbusd.org](http://www.mbusd.org).