Linda Vista is Getting an Education Makeover This Summer

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By Megan Burks

Above: David Mendoza, 12, checks water for ammonia in an aquaponics greenhouse at Montgomery Middle School in Linda Vista, June 22, 2017.

Linda Vista is getting some education love this week. San Diego Unified announced Thursday three of its schools would become science-based magnet schools next year. A new charter school is also breaking ground in the neighborhood.

Montgomery Middle School and Carson and Linda Vista elementary schools will become science-based magnets, meaning they will revamp their curriculum and open enrollment to students district wide.

The U.S. Department of Education awarded the schools $10 million for the change in October. Roosevelt has already gotten to work, helping teachers craft lessons around an aquaponics greenhouse and garden on campus.

"In their science class, if they're learning about the scientific method, they might apply it out here in our garden," Principal Stephanie Brown said.
That's what happened when students discovered their soil lacked nutrients.

"So to apply the scientific method, they decided they were going to grow a cover crop to see if that would increase the nutrients of the soil," Brown said. "Indeed it did and now they're able to grow strawberries out here because it's strawberry season."

Brown said the magnet schools would still have plenty of room for children in the neighborhood. While enrollment at Montgomery is slowly increasing, it has dropped to 450 from a high of more than 800 students. The decrease is due in part by the growth of charter schools, another of which is breaking ground Friday.

Thrive charter school has partnered with the Bayside Community Center a few blocks away to build a brand-new building that will house a school and community programs. Bayside is beloved in Linda Vista but has faced tough financial times in recent years. Thrive has seen national recognition for its personalized learning strategies.

Magnet schools are one way districts can compete with such charters for students.

But principal Stephanie Brown said neighborhood kids will reap the benefits, too, as teachers refocus around the science theme.

"Our kids in the school system are so accustomed to learning things in isolation and really what I call collecting the dots of information. Now the kids can see the connection," she said. "In the real world, we don't stop what we're doing and say, 'I'm doing math right now.' That's not how it works. It's an integration of all the disciplines coming together."

The district also announced Thursday a partnership with California Coast Credit Union to offer teachers grants of $500 to $2,000 for projects similar to Montgomery's greenhouse and garden.

Superintendent Cindy Marten encouraged schools throughout the district — magnet or not — to strive for such educational opportunities.

"Hands on learning leads to real jobs," she said, "and real contributions to our community."