

# School awarded for signature practices

Happy Valley Elementary stresses technology and parent involvement



SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Third-grader Poppy Fooler keeps the rhythm to 'Octopus's Garden' during ukulele class at Happy Valley Elementary School on Thursday.

By Calvin Men

calvinmen@santacruzsentinel.com  
@calvinmenatwork on Twitter

**SANTA CRUZ** » Inside a classroom at Happy Valley Elementary School, music teacher Ket Conway leads 17 third-graders through their ukulele lesson, playing The Beatles' "Octopus's Garden."

The students strum away at their instruments, singing along to the song and reading notes off of music sheets. The instruments and Conway's job are funded in large part by funds raised by parents of the 130 students at the school. Parents are also responsible for other music programs, the art programs, the iPads, laptops and other pieces of technology at the school.

"Those programs would be nonexistent if our parents didn't raise that money," said Michelle McKinny, superintendent and principal for the school. "They fund all those programs."

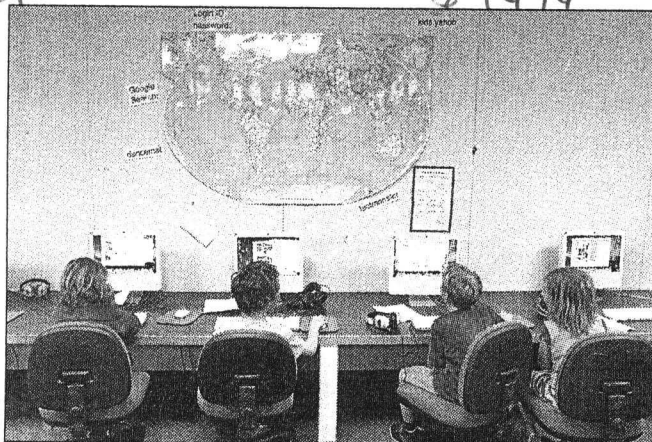
The single elementary school district was one of four in the county to be named by the state a California Distinguished School for 2014. Schools qualify for the award by meeting an academic performance criteria. Once they qualify, an application is submitted by the school outlining, among other things, two signature practices implemented to help students learn.

"I think that for the teachers and people on the ground and parents, it's a really nice accolade and recognition to have and to be recognized for the job that you worked so hard at each and every day," McKinny said.

Happy Valley, which is celebrating its 150th year, listed its two signature practices as parent involvement and implementing technology to enhance learning.

"When you see our school, it looks like a little farm school," McKinny said. "But within the walls, we have a lot going on."

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SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Happy Valley Elementary second-graders create science projects in the school's computer lab.

**"I don't know how teachers did it before (technology)."**

— Bria Nathan, second-grade teacher at Happy Valley

**+** **Online:** To see a video of third-graders playing ukuleles in a music class at Happy Valley School, visit [SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM](http://SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM) and click on this story.

## Award

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Technology is integrated into every grade level to varying degrees. First-graders use iPads to create picture boards and books. Second-graders learn to record videos. Each teacher has a school issued laptop to create projects and presentations. Each classroom regularly visits the school's computer lab to work on projects.

McKinny emphasized the technology aspect wouldn't be possible without the help of parents. Parents raise \$100,000

each year to maintain programs at the school, including art instruction, music classes and classroom supplies. They also manage the library and grounds since school doesn't have a budget to hire librarians or grounds crews.

In Bria Nathan's second-grade class, students earn points for behavior and grades that are updated on a website parents can access. Parents can even send congratulatory messages to kids that appear on a screen inside Nathan's classroom. She operates a website for her classroom where she creates blog entries, posts video projects by students and out-

lines the way her classroom works.

"I don't know how teachers did it before (technology)," she said.

Nathan also talked about the parent support the school receives.

On a recent field trip to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, there was a flood of parents who wanted to help.

"We had like nine parent volunteers to drive and I said this is too much for 19 kids," said Nathan. But she's not complaining, adding that a lot of other schools have trouble getting parents to volunteer as drivers.