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\$2.3 million grant keeps 11,200 students in summer school

Santa Ana enrichment program replaces traditional classes lost to budget cuts.

By FERMIN LEAL

SANTA ANA – Eleven-year-old Jessica Ugalde is spending her summer learning about the different continents, studying language and grammar and going on field trips to places like the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach.

Jessica, a summer-school student at [Muir Fundamental Elementary](#), says she loves keeping busy during her vacation.

"I'm learning a lot to help me keep my good grades," said Jessica, a soon-to-be fifth-grader. "If I wasn't coming for classes here, I'd probably just be at my grandmother's watching TV all day."

Jessica is among 11,200 students in [Santa Ana Unified](#) enrolled in the district's Summer Enrichment, a program replacing summer classes eliminated because of state budget cuts. It's open to all students free of charge in pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade, regardless of whether they earn straight A's or need remediation.

The Summer Enrichment program is run at 36 campuses throughout the city by [THINK Together](#), a Santa Ana-based nonprofit that runs after-school programs in Orange and surrounding counties. THINK Together created the lesson plans in cooperation with district officials and hired the teachers and staff, most of whom already work in the district during the regular school year.

Students take classes from June 25 to July 31 in English, physical fitness, art and other subjects, including dance. They are also provided free lunches and snacks while in school.

Teachers don't give homework or report cards, but instead provide evaluations that will follow students into the regular school year. Class sizes are also limited to 20 students.

For students, the summer classes help them stay on top of their academics. For the 54,000-student [Santa Ana Unified](#), Summer Enrichment helps the county's largest district provide a comprehensive



Australian art masks made by students enrolled in the Summer Enrichment Program at Muir Fundamental School in Santa Ana.

summer school curriculum during a time when other districts are slashing similar services because of the state's financial crisis.

The summer program is primarily funded through the federal 21st Century Supplemental Grant awarded to THINK Together for use in Santa Ana. The grant provides about \$2.3 million yearly for five years.

But, two years ago, THINK Together also received an \$8.5 million grant from Irvine Co. Chairman Donald Bren to run tutoring, after-school programs and other services in urban schools across Southern California.

"If it wasn't for THINK Together and Summer Enrichment, we would be able to provide these services," said Cathie Olsky, the district's deputy superintendent. "In these economic times, we are still able to serve more than 11,000 students a day."

The Summer Enrichment program also allows the district to enroll more students in summer classes because of the wide range of coursework than traditional summer school programs that often focus primarily on remediation, Olsky said.

Last year, the district had about 7,500 students in grades kindergarten through eight, she said.

In a district with high poverty and where many parents work long hours, the program and free meals help parents with child care and other needs during the summer months.

"This is definitely a great service for this community," said parent Minerva Cervantes, whose daughter attends summer classes at [Carr Intermediate](#) with 200 classmates. "I think going to school now will only help her get ahead this fall."

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