

# Unity Academy

EAST SAC SCHOOL  
PRINCIPAL HELPS  
STUDENTS BE  
THEIR BEST



LuTisha McGregor  
Photos by  
Linda Smolek

School District campuses renamed in what Sac City officials call a “commitment to address school facility names that do not support the district’s values.”

As McGregor puts it, “Changing the names from horrible white men who killed people.”

Sutter Middle School became Miwok Middle School. Peter Burnett Elementary School changed to Suy:u Elementary School. Kit Carson transformed into Umoja, thanks in large part to McGregor.

“We’re a school with a Black woman principal,” says McGregor, a self-described “Sac City kid” who attended Phoebe Hearst Elementary and John F. Kennedy High School before college at Alabama A&M University and earning a doctorate in educational leadership at Argosy University.

“I understand the suffering of the Native Americans, but (Black people) suffered, too,” she says. “I brought up the name Umoja, which is the first foundational principle of Kwanzaa that means ‘unity’ in Swahili. That’s what I wanted: unity as it relates to education, making sure we’re all one, united and collaborating for everyone.”

The name captures the environment of a school that’s become a hidden gem in East Sac.

“Very few people know the school exists,” says parent Linda Smolek, Inside’s photography coordinator



who has two kids at Umoja. “Even people in East Sac give me a blank look when I tell them where my kids go to school. I often get asked if it’s a private school.”

McGregor explains that for middle schoolers (seventh and eighth grade), Umoja is a school of residence, drawing students from within the

district. As a high school, it’s a school of choice, without residential boundaries.

Umoja is also an International Baccalaureate World School, where students can earn IB diplomas. For students whose interests might not include college, the school will offer a trade-tech career pathway this fall.

“It’s a great environment to be in,” McGregor says. “It’s rigorous with high expectations, but we have all kinds of support and resources, like counselors and a full-time social worker on staff. The IB mindset is about developing the whole child.”

It’s also about community. When McGregor transitioned into

administration from her career as a physical education instructor, she worried she would lose connections. That’s proven far from true.

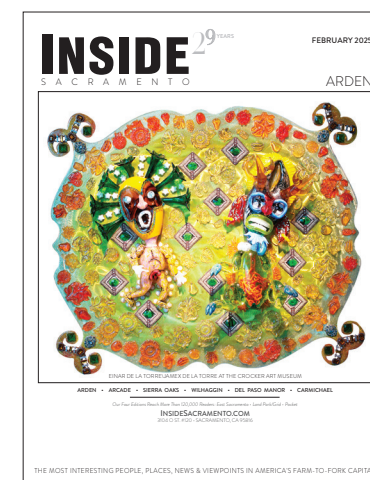
“It’s actually better for me because I’m the support not only for the kids—they always come to my office—but I also support the adults,” she says. “We have a calming room with massage chairs that’s for everyone. I’ll even cover classes so (teachers) can take a moment. If you’re not well, you can’t be well for your kids.”

She continues, “There are only 500 kids at our school, so we have small class sizes with more focus on instruction and relationship building. Everybody knows your name. We’re a family. We’re about accountability, getting the work done and holding each other up.”

For information, visit [umoja.scusd.edu](http://umoja.scusd.edu).

Jessica Laskey can be reached at [jessrlaskey@gmail.com](mailto:jessrlaskey@gmail.com). Previous profiles can be found and shared at [InsideSacramento.com](http://InsideSacramento.com). Follow us on Facebook and Instagram: [@insidesacramento](https://www.instagram.com/insidesacramento). ■

## AS SEEN IN...



*JL*

By Jessica Laskey  
Meet Your Neighbor

For LuTisha McGregor, principal at Umoja International Academy in East Sacramento, it’s all about love.

“I lead with love,” says McGregor. “I tell my students and staff I love them every day and the parents every

week. That’s the type of leader I am. I want to come on campus and feel and see the love.”

Leading with love led to the school’s name change. Long known as Kit Carson, the combination middle and high school was one of three Sacramento City Unified