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Tom Guajardo, superintendent of Greenfield Union School District, stands in front of Greenfield Elementary School, one of the schools he oversees, in early December.

Guajardo heads Greenfield schools

Superintendent leads district's turn-around plans

By **RIA MEGNIN**
The Salinas Californian

In June 2004, Tom Guajardo of Hollister replaced Edward Agundez as head of the kindergarten through eighth-grade Greenfield Union School District.

Guajardo inherited a district where 57 percent of students are English learners, the budget was under county intervention, and all four schools (three elementary, one middle) were designated "program improvement" under federal No Child Left Behind guidelines.

"We had some major issues," he said.

A year and a half later, the Greenfield district has a balanced budget, it's planning construction on a new elemen-

tary site this summer, and it's working closely with the city on future growth plans. Its 2,500 students also are doing better: District-wide Academic Performance Index scores were up 23 points this year, and nearly 300 points since 1999, although the program improvement designations remain in place.

"We exist because we want our students to be successful," Guajardo said.

The district now has standard guides for English and math district-wide and benchmarks "so we know how we're doing toward our academic goals throughout the year," he said.

Guajardo is a regular face at the district's schools, spending time with students as well as staff.

"That's the most exciting thing for me," he said. "My goal is to visit every teacher's classroom at least twice a year. Then I can work with principals on ways to support teach-

TOM GUAJARDO

n **AGE:** 49

n **JOB:** Superintendent and director of special education, Greenfield Union School District.

n **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree in social science, University of California, Los Angeles; teacher and administrator credentials from San Jose State University.

n **EXPERIENCE:** Superintendent of North County Union School District in San Benito County

2002-04, director of special services for Santa Rita Union School District 1992-2002, principal in the Santa Clara Unified School District, worked at the American School in Mexico in Coahuila, acting superintendent for Chualar Union School District.

n **PERSONAL:** Lives in Hollister with wife, Cindy, a preschool director in San Juan Bautista; they have a son, 14, and daughter, 20.

ers and staff development and materials."

He's also focused on supporting the most challenged population in Greenfield: hundreds of immigrants from Oaxaca, Mexico, where natives speak as many as 42 dialects. "Each group has an elder, and I have them on speed dial," Guajardo said. "We need them."

The district works with community resources to offer after-

school, Saturday and monthly programs for Oaxacans, exchanging information about culture and education while teaching families survival skills for life in the United States.

"We're still a small community, and we have to pull together," Guajardo said. "We're definitely moving in the right direction."

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