

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools*

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## **Media Alert**

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**Tulare County Office of Education, College of the Sequoias, Tulare County Superior Court, CASA of Tulare County, and Tulare County Independent Living Program Announce:**

## ***5<sup>th</sup> Annual Access to Higher Education Summit***

**scheduled for Saturday, January 28**

**9:15 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. · College of the Sequoias, Visalia**

*Visalia* - Approximately 110 foster youth from Tulare and Kings county high schools will be treated to a special program Saturday, January 28, 2012. Entitled the “Access to Higher Education Summit,” the event is designed to encourage high school students in the foster youth system to explore and enroll in educational opportunities beyond high school.

The event will be held at College of the Sequoias and begin with a motivational address by Dean of Science, Mathematics and Engineering, Dr. Robert Urtecho. Following Dr. Urtecho’s presentation, students will attend sessions on college financial aid and the AB12 law, which extends eligibility of foster care benefits to the age of 21. Following these presentations, students will enjoy lunch and a visit to a resource fair, where 13 California colleges, universities and programs supporting former foster youth will have representatives.

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The highlight of the event will be a motivational presentation by former foster youth Dee Hankins.

By the age of 12, Dee had been placed in 12 different foster homes and 7 different schools in 9 different cities. He strongly believed that no one cared about him.

However, a simple phone call from a stranger would soon turn everything around. Everything changed when he received a call from a foster youth organization called United Friends of the Children. They persistently encouraged him to enroll in college and even offered him a scholarship. Their efforts opened his eyes and changed his entire view on life; for the first time he realized that there *were* people who cared. After graduating from a four-year university and starting a business, Dee has gone on to become an inspiration for all foster/at-risk youth. He has created Win Your Challenges™, a step-by-step process which he now teaches to audiences around the country.

Now in its fifth year, the Access to Higher Education Summit was modeled after a similar program developed by Judge Leonard Edwards, a retired Santa Clara County Superior Court judge. In Tulare County, the event organizers include College of the Sequoias; the Tulare County Superior Court; the Tulare County Office of Education; the Tulare County Independent Living Program (a division of Tulare County Health and Human Services); and CASA of Tulare County. “It is rewarding to see how everyone works together so well to create this opportunity for our foster youth,” says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak.

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The Friends of Tulare County and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation provided additional funding for the 2012 Access to Higher Education Summit.

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