

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*



## ***2023-24 Annual Report***

A look at the Tulare County Office of Education's impact on students, educators, and parents

# A Message from the Tulare County Superintendent of Schools

It is with great pride that we share the 2023-2024 Tulare County Office of Education Annual Report. The report is produced to showcase the impact our nearly 1,700 staff, the staff of the 43 districts and charter schools, and the many local, state, and federal partners are having on the over 100,000 students in Tulare County.



In addition to stories of impact and important statistics, this year we have chosen to highlight what we are calling “full circle” moments, where individuals are now giving back to programs that benefited or inspired them as students.

Along with the “full circle” stories, you will find highlights that include new programs, recognitions, achievements, and ways our students benefit from working collaboratively with our partners.

It is easy to see that our staff is motivated and creative in bringing opportunities to students, families, and future educators as evidenced by the 11% increase in participation in our Student *Future Ready* Events, the creation of the first-in-the-nation School Counselor Residency program, and the continued selection of our programs to serve as California state

lead agencies. These achievements are possible in part due to willing partners that include universities, nonprofits, other government agencies, community members, and more. The adage, “It takes a village,” is alive and well when it comes to our work for the children of Tulare County.

As you read the stories and see the pictures, it is our sincere hope that you recognize that

our staff is committed to the work through our Core Values: Build Trusting Relationships, Communicate with Care, Grow and Empower, and Commit to Serve. These values were identified by our staff and provide a common foundation to provide impactful opportunities for students, their families, and district personnel that meets their needs, peaks their interest, and ultimately effects their life in a positive way.

Operating in over 100 locations throughout Tulare County, it is the shared commitment to doing what is best for children that drives the outcomes you see in this annual report. From providing in-home services to our youngest children and their families, and developing independent living skills in our adults with challenging circumstances, to facilitating internships, offering elementary students experiences in the performing arts, and supporting students in state and national competitions, we are succeeding in our mission “to prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century.”

I hope you enjoy the stories, statistics, and information about the wonderful staff, students, and impactful activities of our organization. As the Tulare County Superintendent of Schools, it is my honor to serve our communities and support the efforts of all our educators, students, families, and partners to create a place for people to live out their dreams. I have often said, “the brand known as the Tulare County Office of Education is a result of the great work of our staff.” I look forward to sharing many more stories of impact in the coming years.

Sincerely,

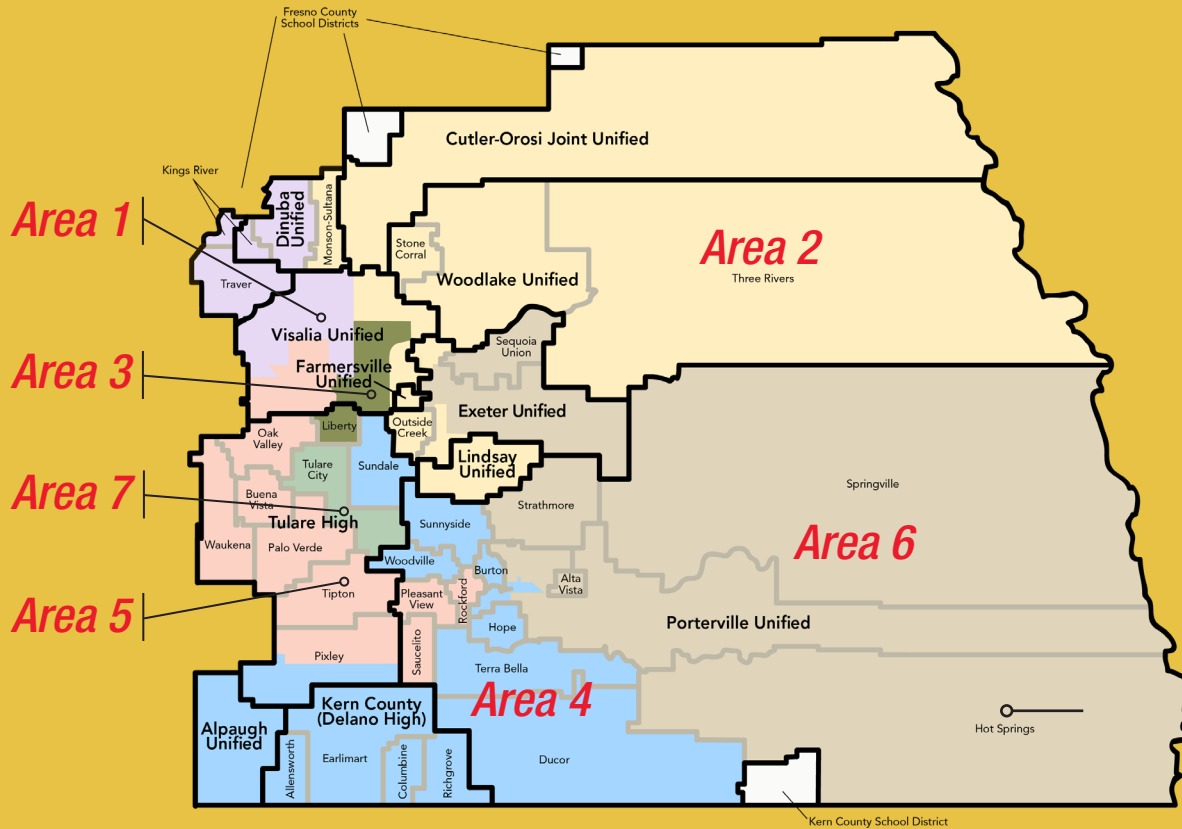
Tim A. Hire  
Tulare County Superintendent of Schools

*“...we have chosen to highlight what we are calling “full circle” moments, where individuals are now giving back to programs that benefited or inspired them as students.”*



# Tulare County Board of Education

The Tulare County Board of Education is comprised of seven elected trustees, each elected to four-year terms. The board typically meets the second Wednesday of each month at the Tulare County Office of Education’s Jim Vidak Education Center on Mooney Boulevard in Visalia. For a schedule of meetings and to learn more about our trustees, visit [tcoe.org/Board](http://tcoe.org/Board).



**Trustee Area 1**  
Celia Maldondo-Arroyo



**Trustee Area 2**  
Debby Holguin  
Vice President



**Trustee Area 3**  
Tom Link



**Trustee Area 4**  
Judy Coble



**Trustee Area 5**  
Joe Enea, President



**Trustee Area 6**  
Chris Reed



**Trustee Area 7**  
Tony Rodriguez

# Our Mission and Core Values

## Mission Statement

The mission of the Tulare County Office of Education is to provide quality service and support to the students and school districts of Tulare County. This is achieved by promoting life-long learning opportunities that will help individuals lead healthy and productive lives. We are dedicated to work in a collaborative manner with students, parents, school districts, public agencies, and communities to prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

## Core Values

The Core Values are a set of organization-wide, shared beliefs that guide our every interaction – both internally and in interactions with parents, school district personnel, and community members.

### Build Trusting Relationships

We value individual perspectives, honesty, respect, and honoring our commitments.

### Grow and Empower

We value continuous learning, monitoring outcomes, celebrating success, and empowering one another.

### Communicate with Care

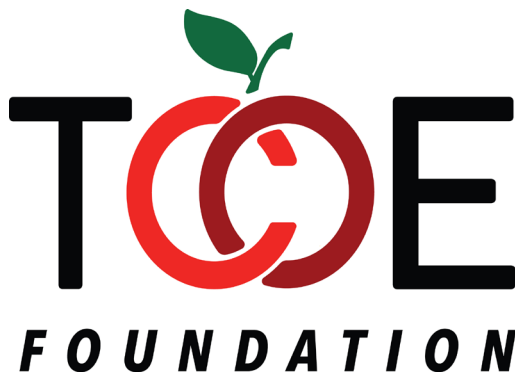
We value mutual, clear communication, active listening, and the contribution of others.

### Commit to Serve

We value empathy, collaboration, responsiveness, and innovation to meet the needs of our team members and those we serve.

## Support Us

Founded in 2000, the Tulare County Office of Education Foundation raises money to support TCOE programs and educators in school districts throughout the county that have innovative ideas. During the 2023–2024 school year, the Foundation awarded over \$29,000 in grants to 16 school programs and clubs, including a robotics team, folklorico dance group, a student leadership club, a district work-based learning program, and a future educators program.



Tulare County teachers, schools, or programs, with innovative ideas that could benefit from a grant from the Foundation, are encouraged to access the application at [tcoe.org/Foundation](https://tcoe.org/Foundation).

## Connect With Us

If you're a Tulare County resident and have children in school or an interest in education, consider connecting with TCOE through our weekly newsletter or social media platforms!

TCOE's newsletter, *News Gallery Week*, shares stories about TCOE programs, TCOE events, standout staff members and students, and happenings around the county. Newsletters are published weekly at [tcoe.org/NewsGallery](https://tcoe.org/NewsGallery). If you'd like to be emailed our newsletter on a weekly basis, visit [tcoe.org/NewsGallery/SignUp](https://tcoe.org/NewsGallery/SignUp) to sign up.

You can also find us on the following social media platforms:





# Organizational Responsibilities

As part of California's three-level public education system, the Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE) is the intermediate level between the California Department of Education and Tulare County school districts. Led by the elected Tulare County Superintendent of Schools, Tim A. Hire, TCOE provides the following support to the local districts and public charter schools.



## Tulare County Superintendent of Schools

- Acts as the primary “implementation arm” of the California Department of Education
- Monitors and oversees fiscal stability of districts
- Reviews school district Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs)
- Provides academic support/assistance to districts and their schools through direct services for small districts, technical assistance, and regional support activities for districts and school staff



## Tulare County Office of Education

- Provides support and services to Tulare County school districts, not governance
- Ensures school district fiscal accountability/solvency
- Approves school district LCAPs
- Provides professional development opportunities
- Assists with academic performance initiatives
- Serves the county's most vulnerable students (expelled, incarcerated/ on probation, homeless/foster youth, students with special needs, early learners)
- Offers additional support through student events/competitions, enrichment activities, and outdoor education programs

## Tulare County Board of Education

- Approves the salary of the county superintendent
- Reviews and approves the county office of education's budget
- Reviews and approves the county office of education's LCAPs
- Establishes and oversees county charter schools
- Hears interdistrict transfer and expulsion appeals



# Organized to Support

The county office of education serves Tulare County's 43 school districts through six divisions: Administration, Business Services, District Support Services, Human Resources, Special Services, and Student Support Services. It's through each division that students, schools, staff, families, and the community receive support and services from TCOE.

Business Services collects, processes, and disseminates all fiscal and budgetary information and reports for all school districts within the county. Human Resources manages internal personnel functions, and is also responsible for registering and monitoring credentials for every certificated person in the county.

Instructional support for educators and students is delivered through District Support Services and Student Support Services. These two divisions are home to 14 programs, including SCICON, Educational Resource Services, and Early Childhood Education.

Special Services is the office's largest division with over 900 employees, who work primarily inside schools and communities providing services to approximately 8,200 students with special needs from birth to 22 years of age. The division also operates programs to meet the full range of needs for mildly impaired to profoundly impaired students.

## County Superintendent's Office

California Center on Teaching Careers  
California Friday Night Live Partnership  
CHARACTER COUNTS!

Communications  
Planetarium & Science Center  
Theatre Company

### Business Services

External Business Services  
General Services  
Information Systems  
Internal Business Services  
Maintenance & Operations

### Human Resources

Credentials & Retirement

### Special Services

Academic Collaboration for Exceptional Learners (AcCEL)  
Alternative Achievement Program (AAP) and the Intervention Resource Classrooms (IRCs)  
Behavioral Health Services  
Bright Start/Bright Future Programs  
Court/Community Schools  
Foster & Homeless Youth Education Services  
Mild to Moderate Programs  
Parent Liaisons  
Preschool Program  
Program Specialists  
Related Services  
SELPA Compliance  
School Psychologists

### District Support Services

College and Career Readiness  
Educational Resource Services  
Leadership Support Services  
Migrant Education Program  
New Teachers & Leadership Development  
Services for Education & Employment (SEE)  
Student *Future Ready* Events

### Student Support Services

California Community Schools Partnership Program  
CHOICES Prevention/Intervention and After School Programs  
Early Childhood Education Program  
La Sierra Charter School  
Region VII System of Support for Extended Learning  
School Health Programs  
School Safety Program  
SCICON  
University Preparatory High School



# County at a Glance

Tulare County is home to 43 school districts and numerous public charter schools. Tulare County school districts range from single school districts, such as Hot Springs Elementary with 13 students, to the Visalia Unified School District with nearly 29,000 students. In California, only Kern and Los Angeles Counties serve more districts than Tulare County. Of the county’s districts, over 75% are considered small districts with less than 2,500 students. Tulare County has more small school districts than any county in the state.

## School Districts

	Schools	Enrollment
Allensworth	1	101
Alpaugh Unified	2	369
Alta Vista	1	520
Buena Vista	1	180
Burton	7	4,844
Columbine	1	175
Cutler-Orosi	10	3,825
Joint Unified		
Dinuba Unified	11	6,313
Ducor Union	1	160
Earlimart	3	1,391
Exeter Unified	7	2,663
Farmersville Unified	7	2,610
Hope	1	219
Hot Springs	1	13
Kings River Union	1	401
Liberty	1	819
Lindsay Unified	11	3,987
Monson-Sultana	1	433
Joint Union		
Oak Valley Union	1	574
Outside Creek	1	141
Palo Verde Union	1	502
Pixley Union	2	861
Pleasant View	2	454
Porterville Unified	23	13,963
Richgrove	1	498
Rockford	1	282
Saucelito	1	71
Sequoia Union	2	384
Springville Union	1	329
Stone Corral	1	112
Strathmore Union	2	697
Sundale Union	1	844
Sunnyside Union	1	302
Terra Bella Union	2	754
Three Rivers Union	1	90
Tipton	1	501
Traver Joint Union	1	245
Tulare City	18	9,253
Tulare Co. Office of Ed.	5	1,605
Tulare Joint Union High	8	5,673
Visalia Unified	42	28,893
Waukena Joint Union	1	223
Woodlake Unified	7	2,085
Woodville Union	1	390

**43** School Districts

**103,200** Students Served

**204** Public Schools

*TCOE leads the state in serving the largest number of small school districts*

## Public Charter Schools

Blue Oak Academy	1	414	Eleanor Roosevelt	1	416
Central California	1	867	Community Learning Center		
Connections Academy			Monarch River Academy	1	1,167
Crescent Valley Public	1	757	Sycamore Valley Academy	1	410
Charter II			Valley Life Charter	2	678

## Enrollment by Student Group

<b>23,816</b>	<b>3,767</b>
English Learners	Migrant Education Students
<b>739</b>	<b>11,193</b>
Foster Youth	Students with Disabilities
<b>2,767</b>	<b>77,438</b>
Homeless Youth	Socioeconomically Disadvantaged

Data obtained from California Department of Education, DataQuest 2023-2024 (Sept. 9, 2024)



# Recognizing Educators

To recognize the contributions of outstanding Tulare County educators, each year we present three awards – the Excellence in Education Awards, the Confucius' Birthday / Educators of the Year Awards, and the Brent Rast Award – an award named in honor of the late TCOE special education teacher, Brent Rast. It is given to a teacher of students with profound needs in the AcCEL Program.

## 2024 Confucius Birthday/Educators of the Year Award Winners

The oldest of the recognition programs is the Educators of the Year Awards. Created in 1994 in partnership with the Central California Chinese Cultural Center, this award honors one elementary, one middle school, and one high school teacher in September to celebrate Confucius' birthday. Confucius was one of China's greatest philosophers and an advocate for universal education.



### Glenda Landin

#### Elementary Educator of the Year

As the school district's reading intervention specialist, Glenda Landin has helped transform Hope School from one of the poorest performing districts in the county to one of the top. Her strategies have included workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions for staff, as well as working directly with students to help pick out books that match their individual tastes.



### Anthony Nguyen

#### Middle School Educator of the Year

Anthony Nguyen of Palo Verde Union School is extraordinarily involved with his school. The bilingual sixth-grade teacher serves on the school's leadership team, coordinates the yearbook, provides photography, and coaches both spelling championship and Anti-Tobacco & Marijuana Challenge Bowl participants. He also works to include 3D printers in his classroom.



### Jacob Avila

#### High School Educator of the Year

Thanks to his solution development skills and ability to connect with people, Jacob Avila of Redwood High School has led the school's Business Management Pathway and Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) team to success. Under his guidance, the FBLA team has gained national notoriety and completed annual community service projects alongside the local business community.



## 2024 Excellence in Education Award Winners

In 1995, Educational Employees Credit Union (EECU) partnered with the Tulare County Office of Education to create the Excellence in Education Awards. This program honors nominees, finalists, and winners in three categories – Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year, and School Employee of the Year. Tulare County school districts and community colleges submit their top candidates, with a committee of educators and community leaders reviewing and scoring each nominee.



### **Alexa Barba-Tepper**

#### **Administrator/Manager of the Year**

Alexa Barba-Tepper started at Redwood High School (RHS) in 2007 as a school counselor, before taking on the role of Assistant Principal of Student Services in 2011. During her 17 years of service, Barba-Tepper has built up RHS's counseling department, organized countless annual traditions, and coached candidates through local credentialing programs.



### **Kristy Caesar**

#### **Teacher of the Year**

Boundlessly energetic and passionate about teaching, Lincoln Elementary's Kristy Caesar creates unique experiences to ignite her students' creativity. Beyond her work as a transitional kindergarten learning facilitator, Caesar serves on the Dollars for Scholars scholarship board, mentors new teachers in her district's residency program, and participates in TCOE's pre-kindergarten programs.



### **Lisa Kruger**

#### **School Employee of the Year**

According to her principal, Lisa Kruger is the "first to step up" whenever someone needs support. This willingness to help is what led Kruger to Linwood Elementary 21 years ago when she volunteered as an after school art teacher. Now an administrative assistant, Kruger continues to serve students by coaching teams for an international creative competition called Odyssey of the Mind, and by organizing assemblies, intramural sports, and "Giving Tree" donations.

## 2024 Brent Rast Award Winner



### **Robert McCool**

#### **TCOE Teacher on Special Assignment, Porterville and Tulare Areas**

Twelve years ago, Robert McCool joined TCOE as an AcCEL teacher at Golden Oak Elementary School. Today, he's using his experiences as an educator to lead the educators of the future. McCool currently serves as a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) with Special Services in the Porterville and Tulare areas. Described by his mentees as an "angel on earth" and "the most deserving person" to receive this award, McCool helps plan lessons, train other teachers, and mentor his colleagues. His favorite thing about his work is being able to learn from his mentees and students.



# Returning to the Program That Helped Her

How former Migrant Education student Itzel Ramos gives back to her community



Itzel Ramos (left) works with Maria to enroll her children in the Migrant Education Program. Maria and her family returned to Porterville this summer, having spent time in another state for agricultural work.

As a former migrant student and current migrant student recruiter, Itzel Ramos has a long history with TCOE's Migrant Education Program. Ramos began receiving Migrant Education services when she was eight years old. The program's home educators would visit with packets of English learner materials and they would work through them together. This was immensely helpful for Ramos, who was learning English as her third language.

The Ramos family spoke Mixteco, an indigenous language originating from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, as their native tongue. Around the house though, Ramos would respond in Spanish. Between her speaking of Mixteco and Spanish, her English often went unpracticed. This is where Migrant Education stepped in.

"The visits gave me extra support with English," Ramos said.

Beyond supporting Ramos's education, the Migrant program also supported her family as a whole. On one occasion, Ramos's tutor gifted her mom furniture and decorations while she was moving.

As Migrant Education helped Ramos build her English skills, it gave her the foundation she needed to succeed in school. She went on to graduate from Farmersville High School and became the first in her family to get a high school diploma. After high school, Ramos wanted to pursue higher education. However, as a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) "Dreamer," she was ineligible for financial aid. Rather than letting this stop her, Ramos got to work.

While attending the College of the Sequoias (COS), Ramos spent her weekends, breaks, and vacations picking seasonal crops in the fields. She also worked part-time with Mini-Corp, a program that recruits Latinx college students as classroom tutors for

migrant students needing additional academic support.

After two years at COS, Ramos transferred to California State University, Fresno to pursue a bachelor's degree in liberal arts. She continued picking oranges, lemons, and grapes in the fields to afford her school-related expenses. She also continued working closely with migrant students through Mini-Corps. As she commuted between Farmersville and Fresno for school, her passion for serving children continued to develop.

"I loved teaching with Mini-Corps," Ramos said. "I liked the one-on-one connection with students."

Ramos excelled in tutoring, and her coordinator, Rosalba Mejia, took notice. Mejia encouraged her to pursue a teaching credential after graduating and with her guidance, Ramos enrolled in San Diego State University's dual language credentialing program for bilingual teachers.



As she pursued her credential online through SDSU, Ramos gained hands-on experience by student teaching in her hometown. For two years, she led classrooms of around 30 students, at times questioning if the profession was right for her. Managing that many students was a lot different from the one-on-one tutoring she was used to.

“I want to help kids, but this isn’t what I thought it would be,” Ramos thought to herself. Contemplating whether she wanted to continue down the path of becoming a teacher, Ramos’ mind drifted to the Migrant Education Program she grew up in.

“It pulled me,” Ramos remembered. “I guess coming back was just destiny.”

With that, she took a step back from student teaching and instead joined TCOE’s Migrant Education Program as a student recruiter. In her new role, Ramos was able to foster the types of connections she hoped for.

“The parents and families are our focus, and I can still be an advocate for them,” Ramos said. “I’m providing service to those in the community like me.”

Today, Ramos’s background helps her better serve the students and families in TCOE’s Migrant Education Program. Her knowledge of Mixteco also allows her to connect with Tulare County’s Mixteco-speaking communities in a language more familiar to them.

Through home visits, Ramos is able to provide students with the same support she received as a child. She even directs migrant students to area administrators who can connect them with scholarships and other college resources. Her work is vital, as migrants who speak indigenous languages are often prevented from accessing support services because of language barriers.

“Migrant Education has so much to offer: support for education, resources for families, and we’re striving to do more,” Ramos said.

Ramos inspires the program’s students with her story. Oftentimes parents will ask her to tell their kids about where she came from. Thanks to her hard work and support from the Migrant Education Program, she can tell them, “That was my situation, now look at me.”

# About Migrant Education

Federally-funded program that provides supplemental services to children and youth, ages 3 to 21, whose education is interrupted because of their migratory parents need to relocate to other areas in search of agricultural or seasonal work.

## Supplemental services include:

- Identification and recruitment support to districts
- Academic programs offered before school, after school, or on Saturdays
- Career awareness/college readiness presentations
- Health service referrals
- Parent advisory councils
- Parent training for involvement and leadership
- School to work opportunities
- Alternative programs for out-of-school youth
- Student leadership opportunities
- College study trips for students and parents
- Student instructional support through California Mini Corps
- Summer school site and home-based academic programs
- Summer PreK academies

## Who we serve:

**PreK-12 students**  
**Out-of-school youth**  
**Parents**

**5,000**  
students served in  
**51**  
Tulare and Kings  
county districts

# Support for Foster and Homeless Youth

Dream Center provides one-stop location for education and social services



On average, 62% of California students attend college. However, some of the most vulnerable are at a disadvantage when it comes to attaining higher education.

According to the California Department of Education, only 49% of foster students attend college. This rate is even lower for homeless youth, with only 44% of unhoused students attending college.

Seeking to close the gap between these students and their peers, TCOE's Foster and Homeless Youth Services Coordinating Program (FHYS) works with over 1,000 school-aged foster youth and more than 3,300 McKinney-Vento students who are experiencing homelessness. FHYS's one-stop resource center, the Dream Center, partners with local agencies such as Tulare County Health and Human Services, TCOE's Parent Liaisons, and the Child Abuse Prevention Council to support students. The program also hosts resource events for students and families.

This year, FHYS reached 260 community members through their fourth annual Spooktacular in October and the first-ever Community Connection Expo in March. These events brought together community partners, educators, and guardians, providing them with new resources and ideas they could use to support the youth in their care. Alongside

these events, FHYS also conducted over 60 training sessions and events for school districts and community partners, reaching over 1,500 participants.

"We work hard to coordinate various services, ensuring that districts have the resources and guidance necessary to provide the best educational opportunities for their foster and homeless students," said Courtney Venegas, TCOE's FHYS coordinator.

Not only did FHYS provide students with access to local resources this year, they also worked to connect them with local colleges. Over 340 youth participated in events centered around higher education throughout the Central Valley this year. These events included the annual Education Summit, the annual Access to Higher Education event, a tour of all three College of the Sequoia sites, a visit to the University of California, Merced, and participation in California State University, Fresno's Super Scholars Summer program.

The visit to UC Merced was so successful that one of the seniors decided to apply to the university. They will begin their collegiate years as a UC Merced Bobcat this fall.

To learn more about Foster and Homeless Youth Services visit [tcoe.org/FosterYouth](http://tcoe.org/FosterYouth) or [tcoe.org/YouthInTransition](http://tcoe.org/YouthInTransition).

***FHYS's Dream Center is a one-stop resource center for current and former foster or homeless youth up to the age of 25. It provides:***

- ***Showers***
- ***Washers and dryers***
- ***Hygiene supplies***
- ***Clothing***
- ***Food***
- ***Internet access***



# CHOICES Partners on New ELO-P Programs

Established in the 2021–2022 school year, the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) provides funding for enrichment programs taking place after school and during school breaks. While funding goes directly to school districts, several districts partnered with TCOE’s CHOICES Programs this year for support in coordinating activities. These opportunities compliment in-class learning by providing engaging, hands-on learning.

At the end of last summer, the California Department of Education provided additional funding for ELO-Ps to schools across Tulare County. This summer, TCOE’s CHOICES program supported five school districts in using that funding to provide students with brand new enrichment opportunities.

Hope School District, Saucelito School District, Stone Corral School District, Waukena Joint Union School District, and Woodville Union School District all partnered with local organizations to provide field trips and on-site enrichment activities for students, free of charge. As a result, 350 students were able to try new and engaging activities.

Stone Corral provided a soccer camp for their students by partnering with Profect Soccer, whose staff taught not only soccer skills, but the value of teamwork and the importance of working hard. Stone Corral also brought students to Riata Ranch, a ranch in Three Rivers that focuses on helping young girls develop strong work ethics and leadership skills through traditional ranch work. At the ranch, students rode horses and practiced their lasso skills.

With the help of the Imagine Arts Center, a nonprofit in Porterville, Saucelito students were able to try ceramics, painting, and sewing. As they got creative with their crafts, students exercised self-expression, imagination, focus, and problem solving.

For their ELO-P, Hope School partnered with STEAM on Demand, an organization that provides online science, technology, engineering, arts, and math curriculum. As part of the program, students received turnkey STEAM kits. As they watched the video lessons, students followed along with the materials in their kits to build straw rockets, marshmallow pyramids, and mummy jars.

Waukena hosted space- and ocean-themed enrichment activities during their summer program. Students created art projects such as seashell wind chimes, planet night lights, and space/ocean lava lamps. They also engineered their own mini rockets and boats, and took field trips to the beach. Most impressively, the program brought ocean touch pools on-site for students to explore.

Woodville also dove deep into ocean sciences during their “Under the Sea” ELO-P. As students traveled to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, San Francisco Exploratorium, and Central Coast Aquarium, they engaged with ELA, math, and science curriculum. The program also partnered with Reconnecting Youth (RY), a prevention program that helps at-risk teens engage in healthy activities, build coping skills, and develop social competencies.

Beyond building healthy habits for at-risk youth, Woodville’s ELO-P also connected them with an inspiring mentor. During the program, Coach Ronnie Holley, a former NFL player and current RY mentor, led workouts for the students and taught them important skills such as resiliency and decision making.

“He’s a great guy who helps everyone,” said Joe, one of the students involved in the program. “He makes a huge impact on everyone, makes them think, and set goals.”

By providing access to new activities, ELO-Ps have sparked the curiosity not only of a future coach, but also of future artists, engineers, athletes, and marine biologists. As students continue to venture into the community through the CHOICES program, they’re sure to continue discovering new passions.





# Undergrads Return to SCICON, Circle J

Tulare County students at UC Merced return to support local engagement



The staff at SCICON have a saying they use to describe the impact of sixth graders' experience at the outdoor education program – “the week that lasts a lifetime.”

For several Tulare County undergraduates now attending University of California, Merced, their visit to SCICON as sixth graders has become, “the week that shapes a lifetime.”

UC Merced student and Woodlake High School alumni Andres Aguilar represented the university at the SCICON Barbecue & Wildflower Festival in April. Standing in front of the university's big blue and gold Mobi Mobile Maker Lab, Aguilar greeted visitors, explaining the various science-related academic programs offered.

Ten years before, a younger Aguilar attended SCICON as a sixth grader. His SCICON counselors and interns impressed him. “How do they know so much?” he laughed. “I wanted to know what they knew!” Curious, Aguilar became increasingly interested in biology. By high school, he had decided to pursue biological studies in college.

Accepted to UC Merced, Aguilar's natural curiosity and enthusiasm bloomed. The fourth-year biological sciences major plans to continue his studies in graduate school, possibly pursuing a Ph.D. Aguilar also serves as the only student assistant to the university's adjacent Vernal Pools and Grasslands, one of four UC Merced research

sites. Aguilar leads tours of the site for primary and secondary students, college students, and community members, covering the plant and animal species that call the vernal pools and grasslands their home.

Speaking on his plans to pursue a graduate degree or even a Ph.D., Aguilar said, “I want to share what I've learned with younger Central Valley students with backgrounds similar to mine, hopefully inspiring them to pursue studies in biology.”

In June, Aguilar returned to Tulare County to support local high school students who were working as interns during the annual Long-term Oak Forest Inventory (LOFI), led by UC Merced researchers and conducted at the Circle J-Norris Ranch.

Seven Tulare County students from UC Merced led 19 high school students in continuing a survey of the ranch's oak forest that began in 2019. Among the students from UC Merced was Esmeralda Quintero, a fourth-year student. Quintero is also a LOFI alumni, having participated in the study while she was a student in Monache High School's Environmental Science Academy in 2021. Quintero shared that she became interested in science in middle school and that she appreciates the knowledge that she has acquired so far, mainly concerning system sciences. “I enjoy seeing how systems work together and how we can collaborate among the sciences,” she said. “In particular, soil science is a system that feeds us, regulates the atmosphere, and serves as a habitat for many microbes. The interconnectedness intrigues me.”

Each day that high school students conducted the survey, they were able to work alongside different students from UC Merced. While they worked together, the university students were able to share their knowledge and interests, and discuss their paths and goals.

Andres Aguilar (above) and Esmeralda Quintero (right) are two Tulare County students now studying science at UC Merced. Aguilar, Quintero and other Tulare County undergraduates returned to SCICON and Circle J to support local high school students participating in field science activities.

“Through activities such as the oak inventory, we hope Tulare County students are able to see themselves in the UC Merced students that come to work alongside them,” said Jessica Malisch, Ph.D., associate director of the UC Merced Natural Reserve System. “Our goal is to develop the scientists who will address the environmental challenges the Central Valley faces. Who better to face these challenges than someone who grew up here?”



## *Salamanders Get a Happily Ever After*

Disney Conservation Fund awards Friends of SCICON grant for habitat restoration

When an atmospheric river brought torrential downpours to the Central Valley in 2023, both humans and wildlife were affected. The storm’s damage was especially evident at TCOE’s outdoor school for science and conservation, SCICON.



As rain washed away or damaged seven of the site’s bridges, it also washed away the breeding grounds of the California Newt and Ensatina Salamanders. Floods deposited sand into the usually still pools where the amphibians live and breed, decimating their natural habitat.

This past spring, SCICON learned that ABC30’s parent company, the Walt Disney Company, was offering grants to help protect, restore, and celebrate nature through their Disney Conservation Fund. Dianne Shew, SCICON’s director, quickly got to work on an application with the help of the Friends of SCICON.

The group proposed a plan to dredge the salamanders’ former reproduction pools and reestablish their natural habitat. The project would give over 8,000 sixth-graders a place to observe not only salamanders, but also turtles and other aquatic wildlife.

Two months after submitting the proposal, a group of seven ABC30 members came out

to support the Friends of SCICON in their initiative to remove the sand.

As part of Disney VoluntEARS, a program that encourages Disney employees to serve their community, the employees toured SCICON and then got to work scooping sand out of the former habitats. By the end of their time at the site, the group had removed 20 wheelbarrows of sand. Shortly after, The Walt Disney Company and the Disney Conservation Fund awarded the grant to the Friends of SCICON to continue their habitat restoration efforts.

With the Disney Conservation Fund’s support in restoring the salamander habitats, SCICON can now also devote attention to other necessary site restoration projects. So far, most of the bridges have been rebuilt and SCICON has made significant progress in rehabilitating the salamanders’ natural environment. Thanks to Disney’s help, both humans and wildlife seem to have gotten their happily ever after.



# Special Friends Impacts Generations

Local librarian gives back to program that helped her in elementary school



Monique Ruiz, the librarian at Vandalia Elementary in Porterville, enjoyed receiving and providing services through the Special Friends program.

Monique Ruiz is a librarian at Vandalia Elementary School in Porterville. As a child, she benefited from a program known as Special Friends – a program that helped the shy student gain confidence.

In California, districts have been benefiting from the primary intervention program since the 80s. For 16 years, the Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA) has allocated funds from the state Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), passed in 2004, to support Special Friends services in 13 districts throughout the county. HHSA contracts with the Tulare County Office of Education's Special Services to coordinate the program.

"I was in Special Friends because I was shy, quiet, and kept to myself," Ruiz said. "I didn't interact with people or kids. In first grade, I recall being picked up by my Special Friend. She was kind and explained the program's purpose and what we would do."

Special Friends enhances the educational experience and social/emotional development of

children who may be having difficulty adjusting to school. In 30-minute, individual weekly sessions, children visit a room where they choose from a variety of different toys and games that they want to play with.

The Special Friends paraprofessional does not direct the student what to play with or lead the session. "The Special Friend gives their undivided attention to the child and builds a connection through acceptance and feedback in the form of reflective listening and positive praise that reinforces their unique importance and dignity," said Monica Arreola, Special Friends grant coordinator.

Countywide, Arreola trains Special Friends one-on-one when they are hired by their district. She also facilitates monthly trainings and school presentations throughout the school year, collects school data, and submits quarterly/annual reports to MHSA in an effort to maintain grant funding for the Special Friends program.

In Tulare County, first-grade students in the districts served by the program are screened using the Walker Survey Instrument. Students who are shy, easily distracted, exhibit low self-confidence or aggression, and those who have experienced a significant or traumatic life event, may be eligible for the program, which is open to kindergarten through third-grade students.

Reflecting on her time with her Special Friend, Ruiz said, "I believed that if she helped me, I could help someone else and make friends with them."

Special Friends work collaboratively with teachers and the school or district psychologist to monitor the progress of the students they serve. Teachers and school leadership also provide Special Friends education to parents of qualified students.



Years later, Ruiz’s mother-in-law told her about a job opportunity with the Special Friends program in Porterville. “I was ecstatic since I could still recall how much I enjoyed the program and how the program had helped me,” she said. “I began participating in the program as a Special Friend in 2014 at Vandalia Elementary School. The children I worked with were hesitant and afraid at first, but they warmed up to me and my classroom – where all the fun happens. They enjoyed themselves and were sad when it was over.”

Today, Ruiz works as Vandalia’s librarian – a position she has held since 2022. “I still see several of my program kids, even if I am no longer a Special Friend. It always melts my heart to hear how much they miss going.” Reflecting on the value of the program, she added, “It’s more than just playing with someone; it’s a place where children can feel secure, have fun, and communicate with someone special without fear of rejection.”



Amanda Hurtado, Vandalia Elementary’s current Special Friend, listens to a student during one of her weekly 30-minute sessions. During these sessions, Special Friends give their undivided attention to the student, providing positive praise that reinforces their unique importance and dignity.

# About Special Friends

One-on-one play sessions with a paraprofessional for students experiencing mild to moderate school adjustment difficulties.

# 1:1

- Reasons for program enrollment include:**
- New to school
  - Shyness
  - Difficulty making friends
  - Divorce or death in the family
  - Homelessness or foster care
  - And more

Students receive up to **15** 30-minute, weekly sessions

## Who we serve:

**600** students served

**3,000** 1-3 grade students screened

**38** elementary schools across

**13** districts

# Student Future Ready Events Inspire

TCOE is enormously proud of the supplemental programs and extracurricular activities provided for Tulare County students. Among them are the widest array of student events found in California. Tulare County not only participates in major state academic competitions, but is home to 30 unique events not found in other counties. These range from the Slick Rock Student Film Festival and Huddle Student-Athlete Conferences to Reading Revolution and Poetry & Prose. These activities and events meet the California State Standards to help inspire students of all ages. Take a look at some highlights of Student *Future Ready* Events that were held this year.



## Young People's Concert

After an interruption by the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual Young People's concert returned in May of this year. Filling the Visalia Fox Theatre, 750 students from nine elementary schools gathered alongside the Sequoia Symphony Orchestra to sing and play their recorders.

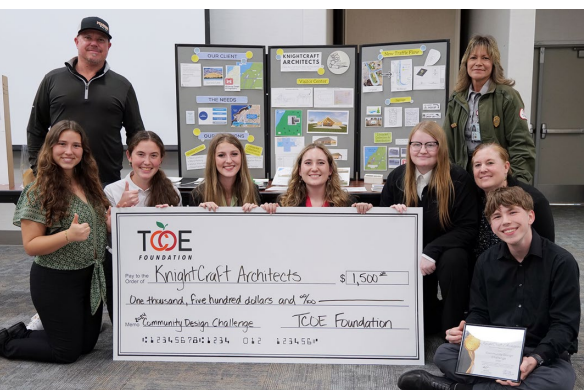
While TCOE and the Sequoia Symphony Orchestra have partnered in the concert since 1959, this was the first year that the concert incorporated the Carnegie Hall/Weill Music Institute's Link Up curriculum. Through this curriculum, students learned to sing and play a variety of songs on the recorder in their classrooms prior to the concert.



## SoCalGas Challenge

In May, the SoCalGas Challenge returned to Tulare County after being put on hold by the pandemic. Coordinated by TCOE's College and Career Readiness program and supported by SoCalGas, this competition encouraged high school students to create business plans that addressed climate change.

Winning first place was the Solar System team of Summit Charter Collegiate Academy in Porterville, which proposed a solution to light pollution by modernizing street lights.



## Community Design Challenge

The Community Design Challenge also returned from a pandemic-related hiatus this year. Created by architectural firm Mangini Associates, Inc. in 2010, the challenge is now coordinated by TCOE College and Career Readiness with the support of Katina Velasquez of Mangini Associates and local architect Gilbert Bareng. It asks high school teams to design a project based on a need within their community.

KingCraft Architects of Harmony Magnet Academy in Strathmore won first place for their proposal to renovate the public amenities, visitor center, and museum at Lake Success.

**Learn more at [tcoe.org/StudentEvents](https://tcoe.org/StudentEvents).**



# Our Schools

## TCOE Charter Schools



### La Sierra Charter School

1735 E. Houston Ave., Visalia  
Grades: 7-12

Now in its 25th year, La Sierra offers a military program where middle and high school cadets focus on military science, physical

fitness, and leadership development. The school is a member of the California Cadet Corps. An independent studies program is also offered, along with a growing Media Arts pathway.

### University Preparatory High School (UPHS)

915 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia  
Grades: 9-12

UPHS focuses on providing an early college experience. Students take a variety of college courses

through College of the Sequoias, while also participating in core academics designed to prepare them for college. The school also has an award-winning robotics team, and offers a robust arts program with choir, orchestra, hand bells, guitar, and theatre arts opportunities. An independent studies program was introduced for the 2024-25 school year.



## Court/Community Schools



TCOE operates Mid-County Community School (Visalia) for students who have been expelled from their home district. The school provides a credit recovery program and a robust career technical education (CTE) program, including building trades, health sciences, and hospitality training. TCOE's Court School provides education for incarcerated youth. This includes traditional educational programming, as well as specialized CTE education and rehabilitative services.

In 2023, Mid-County students opened the M.C. Café at TCOE's Doe Avenue Complex. Each week during the school year, students make and sell coffee, tea, smoothies, sandwiches, salads, fruit cups, cookies, and more to the employees who work at the Doe Avenue Complex.

## TCOE Authorized Independent Charters

### Eleanor Roosevelt Community Learning Center (ERCLC)

31191 Road 180, Visalia  
Grades: K-12

The ERCLC is a free public charter that supports home-schooling families by providing academic resources, extracurricular activities, and instructional support.

### The Academies Charter Management Organization

**Blue Oak Academy**  
28050 Road 148, Visalia  
Grades: K-8

**Sycamore Valley Academy**  
6832 Avenue 280, Visalia  
Grades: K-8

The schools offer an accelerated academic program with project-based learning, gifted education for all, social-emotional learning, and community service opportunities.

### Valley Life Charter Schools

Location: 3737 W. Walnut Ave., Visalia,  
Grades: K-8

Valley Life Charter focuses on leadership, and the visual and performing arts. They also offer a K-12 independent studies program.



# Supporting the Quest for Equity

The four TCOE programs highlighted here are working to address inequities in local school systems that need additional support. Their work ensures equity is promoted across Tulare County. Each of them then allocates resources and opportunities so that all students have a chance to succeed.



## Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) provides students and education professionals across the county with opportunities to practice self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and decision making. Ten Tulare County school sites partnered with TCOE over the past two years to increase a sense of connectedness and belonging on their campuses.

This year, TCOE hosted its second annual SEL Summit at SCICON. During the event, which was co-designed by students, participants attended mindfulness-centered breakout sessions, and collaborated with educators and students from districts throughout the county. By equipping students with the social/emotional tools they need to succeed, SEL empowers youth to

work toward more equitable practices in schools. For more about SEL, visit [tcoe.org/Leadership/SEL](https://tcoe.org/Leadership/SEL).



TULARE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION  
**EQUITY MATTERS**

## TCOE EQUITY STATEMENTS

### *Diversity is an Asset*

TCOE believes that equity is a fundamental value of a high-quality organization and that diversity is an asset to our community.

### *Equity is Everyone's Responsibility*

Learning about and advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion is the responsibility of each member of our organization.

### *People Should Get What They Need*

We are committed to upholding human dignity and ensuring each individual receives what they need to develop to their full potential.

### *We Have to Work at It*

TCOE is dedicated to cultivating equitable practices and policies, examining and overcoming biases, and creating inclusive, just, and empowered communities.

## ***CVNIC: College Ready***

The Central Valley Networked Improvement Communities: College Ready program (CVNIC CR) focuses on increasing A-G requirement completion rates. The goal of this is to increase the number of Black, Latinx, and socioeconomically-disadvantaged students who are eligible to apply to four-year universities.

This year, CVNIC partnered with the National Equity project and focused on continuous improvement for equity in order to better develop their leaders' coaching skills. During their shared learning sessions, CVNIC CR teams worked to investigate inequities in their education systems. Then, based on their findings, the network designed activities that site improvement teams could bring back to their schools to help students better understand A-G requirements and excel in math courses. After these sessions, 87% of network members agreed that CVNIC CR provided them with access to “research-based, better practices.”



## ***Youth/Adult Equity***

Youth Adult Equity (YAE) seeks to involve students and adults alike in shaping school climate. By coordinating intergenerational sessions where students and adults work together to address inequitable practices in their schools, YAE rethinks the educational hierarchy of adults teaching and students learning. This year, YAE held two sessions as part of its Youth/Adult Equity training. During these sessions, students and adults worked collaboratively to analyze data and discover inequities in their schools. They then worked to develop plans to address these inequities.

According to a survey conducted at the YAE training, 100% of participating students would recommend the sessions to their peers. YAE continues this year as new and returning participants regroup. Youth and adults will work together to study their systems and collectively design changes to impact equity.

## ***Differentiated Assistance and Continuous Improvement for Equity***

Differentiated Assistance (DA) is state-mandated support given to local education agencies (LEAs) when their students do not meet state or federal performance expectations. It is a collaborative process that provides additional support and resources.

This year, TCOE's DA services were highlighted in WestEd's “Promising Practices for Differentiated Assistance” report for their success in making DA feel like a “value-add” to LEAs. The report highlighted TCOE's Continuous Improvement for Equity Community of Practice (CIE), an optional series that both DA-eligible and non-DA-eligible LEAs can join in order to collaborate with peer LEAs and TCOE staff to better meet performance targets. CIE teams investigate areas such as academic performance or attendance rates, and then test and carry out changes to promote equity for their students. Thanks to their work, our districts had “better-than-predicted” performance in ELA proficiency, math proficiency, and chronic absenteeism rates.



# Allensworth Library Turns a New Page

Educational Resource Services assists library media aide with modernization



Alma Duran, Allensworth's library media aide, reads to students in the school's newly revitalized library.

Looking back on her childhood, Alma Duran remembers how important the library was to her. Growing up in Allensworth, neither her school nor town had a library, but her parents drove the 20 minutes to Delano so Duran could go to the public library there.

A self-proclaimed small-town girl, Duran said those library trips changed her world. "I love libraries," she said. "I remember being little – I was like second grade when my parents got me my first library card. It honestly opened up my world. Reading a book really opens up your world, your perspective."

Now, as the first-ever library media aide for her alma mater, Duran is sharing her love of reading and libraries with her students at Allensworth School. It's an experience that has been both overwhelming and rewarding for Duran.

Before the 2023–24 school year, Allensworth had a library space, but lacked someone to manage it. Recognizing the need for improvement, Superintendent Robert Cardenas, Ed.D. prioritized revitalizing the library. When Duran

was hired in August 2023, she inherited a space with over 4,000 books, but it was disorganized. Upon entering the library during her first days, Duran was taken aback by the sheer volume of accumulated books.

"I was really overwhelmed coming in here because the books were everywhere," Duran said. "I didn't know how to organize them. I saw numbers on the spine of the books, and I'm like, where do all these numbers go?"

Cardenas and Duran knew the library would take a lot of work. The library needed weeding (the removal of old books), a new circulation system, and student-friendly sections like fiction, non-fiction, and picture books. Thankfully, TCOE's Educational Resource Services (ERS) Library would be there to help.

The ERS Library supports over 50 contracting, small-school district libraries throughout Tulare and Kings counties that do not have a certificated librarian on staff. The ERS Library also provides professional development through its Library Media Network (LMN), which is dedicated to advancing school library services and keeping library staff informed about current trends.

Valarie Seita, the ERS Library media coordinator, was one of Duran's main points of contact during the transformation of the Allensworth library. Seita worked closely with Duran before the ERS Library staff came to Allensworth in December to start the modernization process. ERS Library staff and Duran worked through the fall and early spring semesters to complete most of the modernization. When students returned from spring break, they did so with a newly modernized library to enjoy!

"When I came to visit [after the reopening], she was doing such a great job," Seita said about Duran. "She had a class in front of her, she's circulating books. The kids, you can tell, just love



having the library available to them again...some of them have never had library services.”

In the newly refreshed space, Duran immediately saw the excitement on students’ faces as they stepped into a functioning library that could truly serve them.

“They absolutely love it,” Duran said. “They love it. They really, really love it. Especially the little ones...They’re really excited. That was a big change for them.”

Prior to modernization, Duran knew the library was overwhelming for students and staff, but things are different now. Along with a schedule and new circulation system, Duran also made the library a place to visit for those looking for a calming, quiet space on campus with story time, coloring sheets, and word searches available.

“Sometimes school can be really overwhelming and cause anxiety,” Duran said. “I kind of just wanted to make it a comfort for them. I wanted to make them passionate about reading and learning how to read. I want to go out of my way to help them become better readers.”

One of the ways Duran creates a passion for reading is by making sure her students can see themselves in what they read. Understanding that many of her students are children of immigrants, bilingual, or English learners, Duran ensures the library includes books in Spanish and with plots similar to her student’s own experiences.

“It’s nice seeing [students] involved and feel like they’re a part of something,” Duran said. “It hits home because that’s how a lot of us have grown up, right here, with immigrant parents.”

Seita echoed Duran’s sentiment about ensuring students felt represented in what they read, adding that ERS Library strives to teach and create equity in libraries.

“What I really wanted to do in coming [to TCOE], was to help elevate library services for all of our districts in Tulare County,” Seita said. “We want to make sure all of our kids have the book access they need, to see themselves in books, and to have libraries that are modern and relevant, and add value for the whole

campus. We are building cultures of literacy everywhere.”

Sitting in the library this past summer break, Duran reflected on all it took to get the library where it is and how thankful she is to have the support of the ERS Library staff.

“It takes a village to build something and I feel like it’s really important to have a helping hand,” Duran said. “Asking for help is not a bad thing.”

She added, “All the information you can think of, they have taught me. Like I said, I was very overwhelmed in the beginning prior to me meeting them and working with them, but they have made it an enjoyable experience and a very easy one. And Val has always been there for me.”

Superintendent Cardenas, who set the goal for the new library and has continuously supported Duran, is also included in that village. Working with Cardenas, who was also her principal when she was a student, has been a great experience for Duran.

“I like it because I feel like we have that connection where we kind of understand where we came from,” Duran said. “And we know [the library] is something important moving forward. Not just for the school, but the community.”

Starting the new school year, Duran looks forward to getting the library just the way she wants it, and giving students and their family members more access to resources. By participating in the ERS Library Media Network (LMN), she has the opportunity to expand her world once again and bring back ideas from other libraries to the Allensworth campus.



For more information on services provided by the ERS Library, visit [tcoe.org/ERSlibrary](http://tcoe.org/ERSlibrary).

# School Health Rises to Meet Growing Need



The nurses of TCOE’s School Health Programs do more than just hand out ice packs and bandages. The program’s 12 credentialed school nurses, five LVNs, dietitian, nutritional liaison, and administrative staff work to support student health, build relationships with school staff, and support future health care workers. This school year, School Health served over 36,000 students across 34 small school districts and a variety of TCOE programs.

One TCOE health care provider is credentialed school nurse Sandy Dutch. Dutch has taken care of the students at Sundale Union School for over 20 years. She reflects not only TCOE’s Core Values, but also School Health’s mission as a whole. According to Sundale Superintendent Cindy Gist, Dutch goes beyond what’s expected of her when caring for students.

“She not only worries about the health of our students, but she worries about their overall well-being,” said Gist.

When it comes to physical health, School Health nurses provide first aid, conduct hearing and vision screenings, and help students manage acute

and chronic illnesses. As for mental health, they help conduct health assessments to support students on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), provide counseling, and refer students to additional mental health services. On top of that, they work to maintain a healthy school environment by working with the Public Health Department to prevent the spread of diseases.

School Health nurses work closely with staff to provide trainings on the latest medical policies

and practices. This year, they provided CPR classes for 110 employees, and numerous “STOP the BLEED” sessions.

Nurses in School Health Programs also train district employees and share their knowledge with the health care workers of the future. For Dutch, this has looked like mentoring interns and aides at Sundale.

“I’ve seen Sandy mentor interns that have come over from the county, and it’s rewarding for me to sit back and watch her interactions with them,” Gist said. “She takes such great importance of it and does it in an eloquent way.”

Post-COVID, health conditions such as diabetes, anaphylaxis, asthma, and seizures have increased among school-aged children. For this reason, Sundale is increasing the number of days they contract for Dutch from two days a week to three. Additionally, School Health is expanding its nursing staff. Just this past May, the program brought on three new credentialed school nurses. Ultimately, as student needs increase, school nurses like Sandy Dutch will continue to rise to the occasion.



# External Business Services

Assembly Bill 1200, passed in 1991, established a system of fiscal accountability for school districts and county offices of education to prevent bankruptcy. The law requires districts to do multi-year financial projections, and identify and make public sources of funding for review by county offices of education.

At TCOE, the department responsible for district fiscal oversight is External Business Services (EBS). With just over 20 employees, EBS handles banking services, Local Control Funding Formula calculations, and PERS and STRS retirement reporting for all 43 Tulare County school districts.

The department provides additional contracted support to Tulare County’s smallest districts in the form of budget report preparations, year-end closeouts, and payroll support. In addition, EBS performs oversight responsibilities required by the state such as school district budget reviews, vendor payment auditing, and IRS reporting.

Beyond these duties, EBS also steps in to help districts when they need administrative support. This year, the department prevented the stoppage of business operations in two districts by taking over accounting functions when districts were temporarily without a business manager. Thanks to the work of EBS staff, district employees, and vendors continued to be paid on time.

129

*School district budgets reviewed and approved (budgets reviewed three times each year)*

*Federal and state apportionments processed*

\$2.5 billion

15

*Small school districts where EBS is contracted to perform accounting and budgeting functions*



## Human Resources

The Human Resources Division (HR) manages internal personnel functions, as well as the registration and monitoring of credentials for every certificated person in the county. In the 2023-2024 school year, they processed 2,045 credential, permit, and waiver applications. Of those applications, three belonged to incoming AcCEL teachers Susie Fernandez, Quincy Gomez, and Lorenzo Montecino.

Fernandez, Gomez, and Montecino have worked with TCOE’s Special Services Division. Fernandez started five years ago, Gomez started seven and a half years ago, and Montecino has been with TCOE since he graduated high school. Each one of them started as an instructional aide and worked as a behavioral plan support technician, but this new school year, they will make the leap from technician to teacher.

This wouldn’t have been possible without the support of TCOE’s Human Resources. Currently, none of the three have their teaching credential. However, they have been authorized to teach on an emergency permit called the Short-Term Staff Permit (STSP), which HR helped them obtain. While working on the STSP, the three new teachers will enroll in a credentialing program to obtain their preliminary Education Specialist credential. Although their journey to becoming credentialed teachers is just beginning, HR will be there to help them along the way.

# Looking Forward

Three new projects we'll be working on during the 2024-25 school year!

## Golden State Pathways Program

The Tulare County Office of Education was selected by the California Department of Education

to lead the Golden State Pathways Program (GSPP) this school year. The program seeks to prepare students for postsecondary success by providing them with preparation for college as well as career technical learning.

Taking on the title of Lead Technical Assistance Center, TCOE's College and Career Readiness department will work with the Department of Education in distributing the state of California's \$500 million investment in career pathway programs. Additionally, TCOE will support eight Regional Technical Assistance Centers as they work to provide assistance to grant applicants and recipients who hope to establish or expand their pathway programs.

TCOE's 30 year-history of innovative career technical education (CTE) was a key factor in its selection as the Lead Technical Assistance Center for the GSPP. Beginning with the School-to-Career Program in the 1990s, TCOE's College and Career program has transformed into a collaboration between two county offices of education, eight post-secondary institutions, 14 K-12 districts, and 500 industry partners and workforce development agencies.

As of 2024, Tulare County is home to 1,150 industry pathway courses.

College and Career Readiness looks forward to sharing its success with districts throughout the state.





## Statewide Residency Technical Assistance Center



This school year, the state of California launched the Statewide Residency Technical Assistance Center (SRTAC) to support the growth and sustainability of educator residency programs across the state. Funded by a grant from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), SRTAC is a partnership between five county offices (Humboldt, Sacramento, Santa Clara, Tulare, and San Diego) that serve as regional hubs, as well as the Residency Lab, West Ed., and the UCLA Teacher Prep Program.

As the Central Region Hub Lead, TCOE will serve 11 other counties in the Central Valley and along the Central Coast. Additionally, TCOE will work to make technical assistance systems more effective, assist counties in launching new residency programs, and aid existing residency programs in increasing capacity. In September 2024, TCOE will host a regional kick-off event for the initiative. For more information, visit [tcoe.org/CCTC/SCR](https://tcoe.org/CCTC/SCR).

## California Community Schools Partnership Program

TCOE's California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) has kick-started Tulare County's initiative to develop and expand community schools. These are schools that serve



Pre-K through high school students using a “whole-child” approach. They focus not only on academics, but also on providing health and social services, encouraging youth development, and promoting community engagement.

In order to support local education agencies (LEAs) in their planning and developing of community schools, the CCSPP provides technical support to schools applying for CCSPP grants with the California Department of Education. This year, 59 Tulare County schools received grants as part of the program's third cohort. Additionally, the CCSPP also guides both grantees and non-grantees by hosting community of practice meetings, virtual office hours, and one-on-one site visits.

In the upcoming year, additional schools and LEAs will receive CCSPP grants from the state as part of the program's fourth cohort. The program will also be introducing a CCSPP Essentials Workshop Series and creating a comprehensive resource directory to facilitate connections with community partners.

