



## **2025-26 YOUTH CHALLENGE**

**A GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATORS & ADVISORS**



**Tulare County  
Health & Human  
Services Agency**

**Tulare County  
Office of Education**

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*



# Youth Challenge

## Step Up Youth Challenge: Brief

The Step Up Challenge will take place over the course of the current school year, providing an opportunity for students to complete a project that will have a positive impact on their school and community.

### Who?

- **The Step Up Youth Challenge** is open to middle school and high school teams from throughout the county. *K-8 principals: if you have fifth- or sixth-grade students at your school and they have the availability to participate in a leadership activity such as the Step Up Youth Challenge, these students are eligible to join the team.*
- **One (1) Advisor and a Team of Students from each Participating School:** Each team may have up to 20 students. However, teams may bring no more than 6 students to the Youth Summit, which will be held November 19 and 20 at the McDermont X Facility, located at 365 Sweet Brier Ave. in Lindsay from 9:00 am until 2:00 pm.
- **The Advisor:** A staff member who will recruit student participants, build relationships with youth, and supervise project development and implementation. NOTE: The advisor is critical to the success of your Challenge Project. It is important to choose an advisor who will develop strong relationships with the student participants. It is also important that the advisor has the authority to work directly with members of the Step Up Youth Challenge Committee throughout the year, rather than through an intermediary. The committee wishes to establish a rapport with the advisor to facilitate data and final project collection and to arrange for site visits.
- **The Team:** Students who have the potential to influence the behavior of other students on campus, with a special focus on higher-risk youth who may currently use their influence in a negative way. The team should include representation from each of the grade levels at your school. Previous Youth Challenge participants should comprise no more than 20 percent of your previous year's team.



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- **The School:** The Challenge is specifically designed for both middle school and high school students in Tulare County, participating in simultaneous, but separate competitions.

## What?

- **The Summit:** Teams from all participating schools will attend a Summit to get motivated, gain important skills, identify their topic, and begin developing their Challenge Project.
- **The Project:** School teams will create and implement a project that addresses an important issue in their school or community.
- **The Challenge:** Completed projects will be entered in a Challenge where they will be evaluated. Winners will receive a grant award, which will be given to their school.

## When and Where?

- **September 23:** Challenge Advisor Training at Tulare County Office of Education. The training will be held from 4:30 - 6:00 pm, in the Jim Vidak Education Conference Center, located at 6200 S. Mooney Blvd. in Visalia.
- **November 19 and 20:** Challenge Summit at the McDermont X Facility, located at 365 Sweet Brier Ave. in Lindsay from 9:00 am until 2:00 pm
- **December 5:** Project proposals due
- **November - March:** Project implementation at school sites, Zoom team meetings and site visits from members of the Youth Challenge Committee.
- **February 21:** Mid-year advisor check-in meeting
- **March 12:** Optional Challenge Presentation: *Students will present their projects before a panel of evaluators at the Jim Vidak Education Conference Center. Student presentations address CSS CCR Anchor Standards: Writing 4, 6 & 7; Speaking and Listening 1, 4, 5 & 6. Teams will be assigned times prior to the Awards starting.*



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- **March 13:** Final project report due
- **April 8:** Red Carpet Challenge Awards event at the Jim Vidak Education Conference Center, located at 6200 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia, 6:00 – 8:30 pm

## Why?

- The Step Up Challenge provides a unique opportunity for schools to build leadership skills in students; students will create a project with a much broader impact on school culture and climate.
- The Step Up Youth Challenge is sponsored by the Tulare County Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force. Working with partners, communities, stakeholders, youth and parents, Step Up seeks to address issues that affect all youth in Tulare County by encouraging them to participate in extracurricular activities, foster positive associations and connect to constructive social networks.

## How?

Register your team for the this year's Step Up Youth Challenge by visiting <https://tcoe.org/StepUp/advisor's-corner>.

Once your school information and your team advisor's contact information have been received, you will be updated on all critical deadlines.

## Step Up Youth Challenge: Overview

The Step Up Youth Challenge is a unique opportunity for Tulare County schools to engage a diverse group of students in a project-based learning challenge throughout the course of a school year. The Challenge will guide youth and their advisors through the process of project development and implementation, as well as provide them with the skills and training they need for a successful project. Teams from all participating schools will attend a Challenge Summit, designed to inspire and motivate them in the creation of their projects. Teams completing a project will compete for grant awards for their schools. The Team Advisor, described below, will be critical to the successful completion of a Step Up Challenge project.



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## The Challenge Advisor

The Advisor's primary role is to build relationships with youth in the program. Advisors typically work in the school and are known for their ability to connect with youth. Successful advisors have come from a variety of backgrounds, including ASB advisors, after school site coordinators, campus administrators and classroom teachers.

Advisors may serve as the primary recruiter for the project and as the facilitator in making sure that the project is completed successfully. In addition to relationship-building, the advisor's responsibilities include:

- Being the primary point of contact for all project communication between the Tulare County Step Up Program Administrator and the school
- Identifying appropriate youth and recruiting them for the program
- Helping youth identify the needs of the community and/or school
- Collecting student data and arranging for students to complete pre and post surveys
- Coaching and providing role models for each youth
- Facilitating the development and completion of the project plan
- Acting as a liaison between the team and the school administration/community to facilitate youth access to resources needed for the project
- Assisting youth in conducting presentations on their project to community or countywide audiences
- Completing the advisor section on the final project report



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The ideal advisor has excellent relationship-building skills with youth, as well as in-depth knowledge of the community and the youth who live there. The advisor could expect to spend time roughly equivalent to that of a campus club advisor. Advisors will receive a **\$350 stipend** upon project completion. Schools may decide to include additional advisors; however, only one \$350 stipend will be issued per school.

## The Challenge Team

The ideal student team will be a diverse group of a minimum of 6 students. Each team may select 14 additional students to serve as alternates in case original team members must be replaced. Some diversity indicators to consider:

- GPA
- Race/Ethnicity/Gender
- Behavioral records
- School involvement
- Socioeconomic status

It is expected that the majority of the Challenge Team will be comprised of students who may not necessarily have been engaged in school activities in the past and have the potential to influence others on campus. This will likely include youth who currently have a negative influence on other students. However, students who traditionally participate in leadership and extracurricular activities may make up part of the group. The team should include representation from each of the grade levels at your school. Previous Youth Challenge participants should comprise no more than 20 percent of your previous year's team.

Advisors will be trained on the selection of their school's Challenge Team during the September Challenge Advisor Training. **Students should not attend the Advisor Training.**

The students on the Challenge Team will work with their advisor to:

- Identify a goal or issue that is important to their school and/or community
- Develop a project plan and complete a project
- Conduct presentations on their project to school, community, or countywide audiences
- Complete the team section on the final project report



# Youth Challenge

## The Challenge Project

Each team will design their Challenge Project to address a theme that is locally important to their school or community. Teams may choose from the following categories:

1. Community (poverty, homelessness, health, safety, environment, etc.)
2. Relationships (gangs, family, peer pressure, bullying, relationship abuse, etc.)
3. Self (substance abuse, addiction, self-esteem, suicide prevention, nutrition, etc.)
4. Other themes identified by the Challenge Team that greatly affect their school. (Teams choosing this category will need the approval of the Challenge Committee before moving forward with their project.)

The implementation phase of the Challenge Project will be November 2025 – March 2026. Some project examples are listed below:

- Develop a campaign to stop bullying on campus, including training for students and staff on what to do if they witness bullying, as well as an anti-bullying pledge for students and staff to sign, and anti-bullying signs around campus.
- Design a mentoring program that pairs older and younger students at their school.
- Create a video highlighting the theme of relationship abuse, including steps everyone can take to prevent and intervene in an abusive relationship.





# Youth Challenge

## Challenge Point System

The Challenge team will be rated based on the five key elements listed below. Four points will be possible in each section, for a total of 20 points.

Component	Maximum Points
Component 1 – Meets a real school or community need	4 points
Component 2 – Coordinates with a community agency, another school, a business, or the community at large	4 points
Component 3 – Helps foster civic responsibility	4 points
Component 4 – Impact on the school or community	4 points
Component 5 – Provides a plan for sustainability	4 points
Total Possible	20 points

**Middle and high schools will compete separately** for grants that each school will be able to use for materials, supplies, or activities that are directly related to students. Schools that include both middle and high school grade ranges must compete in the high school category. However, such schools are encouraged to include students of all grades in their activities for maximum impact.

*The Step Up Youth Challenge Committee reserves the right to award grants according to merit and based on desired outcomes. Grant funding awarded to winning schools is intended to be used on materials, supplies, and/or activities directly related to students. The grant monies may not be used for field trips. Examples of allowable uses include: continuing the Challenge Community Service project, or purchasing materials or items that would directly benefit students (i.e. computers or other technology).*



# Youth Challenge

Awards will be given in the following categories:

**Phil Cox Award- \$2,500**

For the project that demonstrates excellence in all six component categories.

**Meet the Need - \$1,000**

For the project that best identifies and meets a school or community need.

**Community Collaboration - \$1,000**

For the project that best coordinates with school and community partners.

**Impact - \$1,000**

For the project that has the most significant impact on the school or community, and the Team members.

**Sustainability - \$1,000**

For the project that will either be sustained long-term at the original school site, or can be easily replicated in other schools and communities.

**Challenge Presentation Awards - \$700**

A panel of judges will select a winner from teams in both the middle and high school categories that choose to participate in the optional Challenge Presentation.





## **2024-25 Step Up Youth Challenge Award Winners**

### **Middle Schools**

#### *Best Overall*

Lincoln Elementary School (Lindsay Unified)

#### *Community Collaboration Award:*

Traver Elementary School (Traver School District)

#### *Impact Award*

Kings River Union School (Kings Union School District)

#### *Meeting the Need Award*

Freedom Elementary School (Farmersville Unified)

#### *Sustainability Award*

Blue Oak Academy

(The Academies Charter Management Organization)

### **High Schools**

#### *Best Overall*

University Preparatory High School  
(Tulare County Office of Education)

#### *Community Collaboration Award:*

La Sierra High School Military Academy  
(Tulare County Office of Education)

#### *Impact Award*

Lovell High School (Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified)

#### *Meeting the Need Award*

Mission Oak High School  
(Tulare Joint Union High School District)

#### *Sustainability Award*

Accelerated Charter High School  
(Tulare Joint Union High School District)

### **Presentation Awards**

#### *Middle School*

Live Oak Middle School  
(Tulare City Elementary School District)

#### *High School*

Mission Oak High School  
(Tulare Joint Union High School District)



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