Tulare County Office of Education

Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools









2022-2023 Annual Report

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

Contents



A Message from the Tulare County Superintendent of Schools



It is my pleasure to present the Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE) 2022-2023 Annual Report. I hope that you will take this opportunity to appreciate the impact that the programs, services, and staff of our office are making throughout Tulare County.

The stories and statistics included paint a picture of the successes and challenges our students experience. From preschool to adults, TCOE's 1,900+ staff members embrace

working with students to meet their every need on their journey to becoming productive members of our community. Each year in this publication, we will provide new and different insights into our programs and people making a difference in the lives of our students.

The past school year was a big one for TCOE. In addition to the stories and programs you will see in the following pages, 2022-2023 also included the opening of the Redwood Center Café, a coffee and snack area in the Jim Vidak Education Center run by adults with disabilities; and renewed partnerships with county, state and national organizations such as The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, CSU Bakersfield, and many more.

Much of what our office provides for our students and school districts comes from staff innovation and strong partnerships. More than 50% of the TCOE budget is grant money and service contracts. Our staff makes every effort to bring additional resources into Tulare County via competitive grant applications that often include invested partners. Working alongside Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency, the Step Up Youth Challenge and Tulare County Red Ribbon Week are two examples of successful activities for students that would not be possible without these valuable partnerships.

Our efforts to achieve our mission of "promoting life-long learning opportunities that will help individuals lead healthy and productive lives" continued through programs such as SCICON, which saw over 20,000 students, counselors, teachers, and researchers visit this year!

Character education is embedded in the weekly instruction of more than 150 schools in Tulare County and 16 school districts have student athletes and coaches pledge to Pursue Victory with Honor. Nearly 450 student films and public service announcements were submitted and showcased during the Slick Rock Student Film Festival. Lastly, last school year the College and Career EXPO showcased the skills and knowledge of over 650 students competing in 27 events.

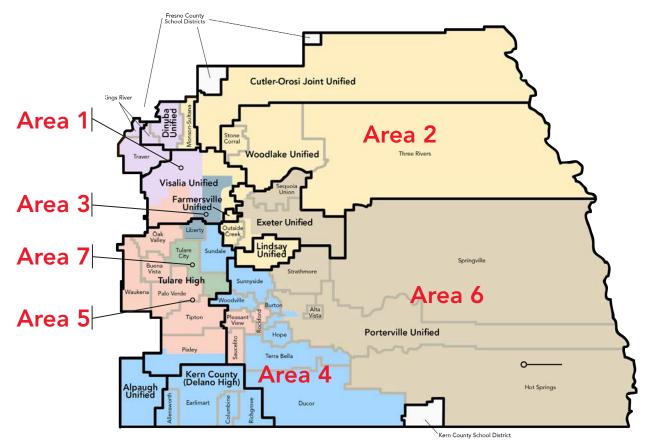
It is a true pleasure to serve as the Tulare County Superintendent of Schools because of the dedication and commitment to our students demonstrated by our staff, the districts, and our community partners. I hope you enjoy this snapshot of the impact we are making on the more than 100,000 students and their families in Tulare County.

In service to our community,

Tim A. Hire Tulare County Superintendent of Schools

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 on Mooney Boulevard in Visalia. For a schedule of meetings and to learn more about our trustees, visit tcoe.org/Board.





Trustee Area 1 Celia Maldondo-Arroyo



Trustee Area 5 Joe Enea, Vice President



Trustee Area 6

Chris Reed

Trustee Area 2 Debby Holguin



Trustee Area 3 Tom Link, President



Trustee Area 7 Tony Rodriguez



Trustee Area 4 Judy Coble



Responsibilities of the Organization



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 the 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 and foster youth, 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 Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP)
- Establishes and oversees county charter schools
- Hears interdistrict transfer and expulsion appeals







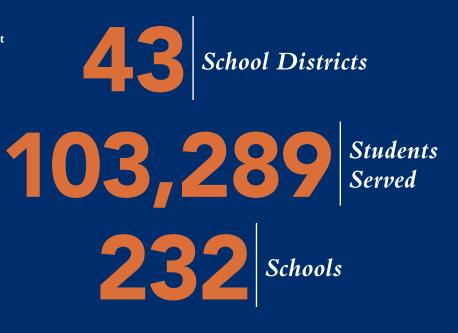
County at a Glance

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 | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| Alpaugh Unified | 2 | |
| Alta Vista | 1 | 495 |
| Buena Vista | 1 | 197 |
| Burton | | |
| Columbine | | |
| Cutler-Orosi | | |
| Joint Unified | | |
| Dinuba Unified | 11 | 6 171 |
| Ducor Union | · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · | 120 |
| Earlimart | | |
| | | 1,442 |
| Exeter Unified | | |
| Farmersville Unified | | |
| Hope | 1 | 229 |
| Hot Springs | 1 | 13 |
| Kings River Union | 1 | 405 |
| Liberty | 1 | 781 |
| Lindsay Unified | | |
| Monson-Sultana | 1 | 429 |
| Joint Union | | |
| Joint Union Oak Valley Union | 1 | 571 |
| Outside Creek | 1 | 130 |
| Palo Verde Union | | |
| Pixley Union | | |
| Pleasant View | 2 | 413 |
| Porterville Unified | | |
| Richgrove | | |
| Rockford | ····· 1 | 310 |
| Saucelito | | |
| Sequoia Union | | |
| Sequera Officia | ·····∠ · 1 | 220 |
| Springville Union | I . 1 | |
| Stone Corral | | |
| Strathmore Union | | |
| Sundale Union | | |
| Sunnyside Union | | |
| Terra Bella Union | | |
| Three Rivers Union | | |
| | | 519 |
| Traver Joint Union | 1 | 224 |
| Tulare City | 18 | 9,172 |
| Tulare Co. Office of Ed. | 5 | 1,646 |
| Tulare Joint Union Higl | | |
| Visalia Unified | 42 | .28,893 |
| Waukena Joint Union | 1_ | |
| Woodlake Unified | 7 | . 2.099 |
| Woodville Union | | |
| woodvine Onion | | |



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

Public Charter Schools

Schools Enrollment

| Blue Oak Academy1342 |
|------------------------------|
| Central California1696 |
| Connections Academy |
| Crescent Valley Public1 663 |
| Charter II |
| Eleanor Roosevelt1 390 |
| Community Learning Center |
| John Muir Charter1 |
| Monarch River Academy1 1,125 |
| Sycamore Valley Academy.1392 |
| Valley Life Charter2662 |

Data on pages 6 and 7 obtained from California Department of Education, DataQuest 2022–2023.

Organized to Support

The county office of education serves Tulare County's 43 school districts through five divisions: Administration, Business Services, Human Resources. Instructional Services, and Special Services. The work of the Superintendent of Schools may be more widely known but its 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 Services is collectively designed to determine the needs of schools and deliver identified services in the most effective manner possible through two branches - District Support Services and Student Support Services. The division is home to 11 programs, including Migrant Education, School Health Programs, and the CHOICES Programs.

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.

Enrollment by Student Group

25,209 English Learners 3,613

713 Foster Youth

2,142

Homeless Youth

Migrant Education Students

10,504 Students with Disabilities

79,442 Socioeconomically Disadvantaged

Enrollment by Ethnicity

13.66% White 1.89% Asian 1.51% Two or more 1.31% Not reported 0.99% African American 0.7% Filipino 0.63% American Indian / 0.15% Pacific Islander

Recruiting and Preparing Teachers

Three TCOE programs are involved in recruiting and training teachers – not just locally, but regionally and statewide.

 ${
m At}$ TCOE, three programs are involved in recruiting and training teachers – not just locally, but regionally and statewide. Our Human Resources, New Teacher & Leadership Development program, and the California Center on Teaching Careers each have a role in attracting teachers to the field of education and helping them obtain their credentials or obtain additional education.

Human Resources

Annually, Human Resources (HR) helps to coordinate the Tulare and Kings Counties Teacher Recruitment Fair, inviting dozens of school districts and charter schools to send representatives to meet with teachers who attend. In addition, HR provides information about the credentialing process, issues applications and renewal forms, reviews credential applications and submits them to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC).

1,664 credential applications submitted to CCTC





New Teacher & Leadership Development

The New Teacher & Leadership Development (NTLD) program provides an alternative path to obtain a teaching or administrative credential accredited by the CCTC. NTLD offers administrative credentials through its iLEAD Program and a Career Technical Education Credential for adults who have experience in industry sectors, including agriculture, building trades, business, and health science. NTLD is also home to the

IMPACT Intern Program, which provides single subject, multiple subject, and education specialist credentials. This report contains the story of Eric Nunes, a former dairyman who became a teacher through the NTLD IMPACT Intern Program. Read his story on page 10.

Teacher Induction Program

 ${
m T}$ he Teacher Induction Program is the fourth branch of NTLD and a mandatory two-year mentor program for teachers holding a preliminary credential. As they enter the workforce, new teachers are paired with a veteran teacher who supports and coaches them. Together the mentor and the inductee create an individualized learning plan and work together to tailor their teaching practice to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession. After completing the program, the teacher's preliminary credential is cleared.



Number of school districts served by the Teacher Induction Program



Teacher candidates



Mentor teachers

California Center on Teaching Careers

Since 2001, the Tulare County Office of Education has led California regional and state teacher recruitment efforts. In 2018, TCOE became the home of the California Center on Teaching Careers (The Center) – a statewide recruitment program that conducts live and virtual recruitment fairs and works with districts and county offices of education throughout the state to do the same. The goal of the program is to elevate the teaching profession and – through partnerships with state agencies and institutions of higher education – to help alleviate California's teacher shortage.



Teachers and candidates that attended 14 virtual and in-person events coordinated by The Center.

The program is also home to three successful teacher residency programs – the Preparing Rural Inclusive Mental Health Educators (PRIMHE), Rural Access to Mental Health Professionals (RAMHP), and the Teacher Residency for Rural Education (TRRE), which is profiled below.

TRRE Program

The Teacher Residency for Rural Education Project (TRRE) is a partnership between The Center and California State University, Bakersfield that allows teacher candidates to earn their single subject credential while also working toward a master's degree in education. Program residents are placed in high-need classrooms where they gain clinical co-teaching experience by teaching alongside a mentor. As they teach,



they also complete coursework for their credential.

This year, 15 candidates completed the program, earning their master's degree and credential. The graduates are working in Tulare and Kings county high schools.

From cow pens to the classroom

IMPACT Intern Program helps dairyman realize his dream of becoming a teacher



With social studies textbooks piled high, art supplies strewn across desks, and miscellaneous posters flopped over chairs, Eric Nunes' classroom is a chaotic work in progress. As he prepares for Palo Verde School's rapidly approaching first day of school, the 50-year-old teacher is excited but nervous. For the past three years Nunes has taught older grades: sixth, seventh and eighth, but this year he'll be switching to third grade. The move to elementary school is a new, but welcome, challenge — one that Nunes describes as a "leap of faith."

Nunes is no stranger to leaps of faith; in fact, his decision to become a teacher was one. Before teaching, Nunes worked on his family's dairy for 22 years. As a thirdgeneration dairy farmer, he grew up helping with the business and continued to work there into adulthood.

In 2006, after his father and grandfather retired, he partnered with two of his

cousins to take over. While fulfilling, life on the dairy was exhausting. Nunes worked almost nonstop to keep everything running smoothly.

"Cows don't know it's Sunday or Thanksgiving, just that it's morning and they need to be milked," Nunes said.

On top of co-managing the dairy, Nunes also volunteered at St. Aloysius School. His son and daughter both attended, and he wanted an opportunity to help his kids' school. That volunteering soon turned into substitute teaching when the school encountered a substitute shortage.

Nunes continued to balance the dairy and his substitute

teaching until the dairy business reached a turning point in 2016. At that point, the Nunes Brothers Dairy had expanded to two properties, but their lease was almost up. Besides that, their facilities were old and in need of repairs. The cousins could either invest more time and money into their business, or they could go their separate ways.

As the family approached a fork in the road, Nunes remembered one of his high school math teachers. His Algebra II teacher not only helped him discover his love for math, but he also coached sports at the same time. "I remember thinking at the time that he had the coolest job in the world – he got to teach math and coach," Nunes said. It was his algebra teacher's class all those years ago that first made him think of teaching full-time.

"I thought to myself, 'I could do what my high

school teacher did: math and coaching,'" Nunes reflected. "And I loved substituting, especially math."

So, Nunes decided to "roll the dice" and switch careers. He finished his last year at the dairy strong, not taking a single day off from the end of August to December 31. "It was weird waking up January 1," Nunes said. "I was like 'Oh my gosh, I have a break'."

Of course, that break didn't last long; teaching full-time came with its own unique challenges.

"The one thing about working with cows is they don't talk back to you the way students do." Nunes quipped. "Well, they don't talk at all."

In 2019, he transitioned from St. Aloysius to Palo Verde School. Although they were a handful, Nunes' students taught him lessons that the cows never could. His first class at Palo Verde was comprised of 15 students, one of whom was deaf. To make sure the student's interpreter could keep up, Nunes learned to slow down and explain things more thoroughly. On top of that, working at such a rural school, Nunes encountered students with a childhood very different from his own.

"I kind of grew up in a bubble," Nunes admitted. "It opened my eyes [working] here."

Along with adapting to his students, Nunes also had to adapt to the technology that his school used. As a dairyman who hadn't used much technology in the past, Nunes was hesitant to "press the wrong button." Technology was confusing enough for Nunes pre-pandemic, but when COVID-19 hit, he felt like it was his "kryptonite."

"I could work for UPS. I could work for



Costco," he recalled thinking to himself. "This Zoom thing is driving me crazy."

In August 2020, he joined the New Teacher & Leadership Development (NTLD) IMPACT Intern Program to complete his credential – still utilizing Zoom. Nunes chose to pursue a multiple subject credential, one of several the program offers to teachers and administrators. Despite his struggles with new technology, his NTLD cohort kept him grounded. His peers and instructors played tech support while also providing emotional support.

"NTLD saved me from stressing," Nunes said. "They were always telling me 'You got this. Don't worry, you're overthinking this."

Although the switch to third grade will be demanding for Nunes, he's no stranger to change. After a couple years of teaching and the help of the NTLD, he's found his bearings. Now, no matter what those third graders throw at him, he's up for the challenge. "NTLD saved me from stressing. They were always telling me 'You got this.'"

Supporting Classrooms

Numerous TCOE programs play a part in supporting learning in Tulare County schools and Child Development Centers. In this report, we highlight three of these programs and their successes.





Educational Resource Services

Educational Resource Services (ERS) helps teachers teach more effectively, and provides library and media services for students. For school districts, ERS provides instructional consultants who host workshops for teachers and administrators on all subject areas to help with curriculum development, instructional practices, and assessment. The consultants also work in contracting districts to strengthen instruction, resulting in increased student achievement.

ERS is also home to the Readership project, which is working to increase literacy throughout the county, and two networks applying improvement science to transform learning in math and bolster college readiness for Black, Latinx and low-income students. The improvement networks are known as CVNIC: Mathematics and CVNIC: College-Ready.

38,011 Tulare and Kings county students

served by the ERS Library & Media Services

<u>1,488</u>

days spent by ERS consultants in support of Tulare County agencies, districts, and TCOE

Leadership Support Services

Since its creation in 2015, Leadership Support Services (LSS) has become a valued planning partner for districts to increase outcomes for students, resulting in a positive impact on our county's educational institutions.

Over the years, LSS has harnessed the power of collaboration and data-driven decision-making to facilitate progress. In the past year alone, the department held at least two meetings with every school district in Tulare County – supporting district leaders, educators, and education partners to come together to chart a path toward improvement. Over 50 Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) – representing over 8,000 pages of text – were meticulously reviewed to ensure that the strategies and actions outlined in the plans aligned with a vision of equity and progress for all students in Tulare County.

As a testament to its dedication to equity, LSS is excited to support the return of the TCOE Equity Conference in 2024. Building on the success of previous conferences, this upcoming event promises to delve deeper into strategies, insights, and best practices that foster equitable education. Keynote speakers and breakout sessions will provide a platform for meaningful discourse and action-oriented solutions, making the 2024 Equity Conference an event not to be missed.





Information Systems

Keeping classrooms connected to the internet is one of the many responsibilities of the Information Systems Department (IS). In addition to supporting students at TCOE's Early Childhood Education sites, special education classrooms, charter schools, and SCICON, IS is the internet service provider for 31 of Tulare County's districts and charter schools.

Recognizing Educators

Educators in Tulare County make significant impacts on students daily, and every year we recognize their contributions with three awards – the Excellence in Education Awards, the Confucius' Birthday / Educators of the Year Awards, and the Brent Rast Award.

The oldest of the recognition programs is the Educators of the Year Award. 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 China's great philosopher and advocate for universal education.

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, whose nomination packets are reviewed and scored by a committee of educators and community leaders.

Brent Rast worked for the Tulare County Office of Education and was an exceptional teacher of students with special needs. After he passed away, the Special Services Division created an annual award in his honor in 1994. It is given to a teacher of students with profound needs within the Academic Collaborative for Exceptional Learners (AcCEL) Program.





2023 Excellence in Education Award Winners







Tammy Bradford

Administrator/Manager of the Year

Tammy Bradford has served as the Tulare County Office of Education's Assistant Superintendent of Special Services for the past eight years. Through her leadership, Special Services has created new programs such as the Alternative Achievement Program, the Dream Center for foster and homeless youth, and the Mental Wellness Triage Grant.

Jennifer Powers Teacher of the Year

Jennifer Powers works as a fifth-grade teacher at Heritage Elementary School in Tulare, where she has taught for the past 14 years utilizing inclusive, hands-on instruction. Powers is also involved with her school's extracurriculars, and serves as her school's technology and professional development lead.

Sonya Lopez School Employee of the Year

Sonya Lopez works as a Technical Job Developer and Work-Based Learning Coordinator in the Porterville Unified School District. As a Porterville native, she's returned to her hometown to "pay it forward," helping

students transition into college and career. By connecting with her community, Lopez has placed over 1,500 students in internship opportunities.

2023 Confucius Birthday/Educators of the Year Award Winners





Renee Carson

Elementary Educator of the Year

Renee Carson works as a sixth grade Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) teacher at Westfield Elementary School in the Porterville Unified School District. After 31 years of teaching, Carson continues to challenge her students every day. She works with students to develop projects for the Tulare County Science and Engineering Fair and coaches the school's Reading Revolution team.

Monica Robles

Middle School Educator of the Year

Monica Robles works as a seventh- and eighth-grade math teacher at Burton Middle School. She also serves as the math department lead. With 13 years of teaching experience, Robles is a master lesson planner. She uses real-world scenarios to create engaging and hands-on lessons. As a result, her students have shown the greatest academic growth school-wide.

Renee Thornburg

High School Educator of the Year

An alumna of Woodlake High School (WHS), Renee Thornburg returned to teach at her alma mater in 2019. Thornburg has taught dual enrollment classes at WHS through College of the Sequoias and serves as the Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisor. Thanks to her work, the school's agriculture program has grown significantly.

2023 Brent Rast Award Winner



Heather Albanez

TCOE AcCEL Teacher, Terra Bella Union School

Heather Albanez is a veteran educator with over 20 years of experience. She has been an AcCel teacher for Terra Bella Union School since 2010. In her position, she works with many of the same students from kindergarten to eighth grade, developing strong bonds with them over time. She strives to focus on building students' communication abilities and appropriate behaviors. Albanez also works to include her students in as many general education events as possible, such as attending SCICON, transforming her room into a giant haunted house at Halloween, performing at the Porterville Fair, and other on-campus events.

Supporting Young Learners and Their Families



Serving Tulare County's youngest learners, TCOE's Early Childhood Education Program (ECE) offers a variety of childcare options. Services are available through 20 Child Development Centers located throughout the county or through home care options. Below are our program enrollment numbers for the 2022-2023 school year.

| Directly Served* Head Start / State Preschool (CSPP) | Enrollment 988 |
|--|-------------------|
| Early Head Start | 258 |
| Migrant Seasonal Head Start | 91 |
| Total | 1,337 |
| | |
| | |
| Indirectly Served* | Enrollment |
| Indirectly Served* CalWorks Stage 2 | Enrollment 595 |
| | |
| CalWorks Stage 2 | 595 |
| CalWorks Stage 2 CalWorks Stage 3 | 595 745 |
| CalWorks Stage 2 CalWorks Stage 3 California Alternative | 595 745 |

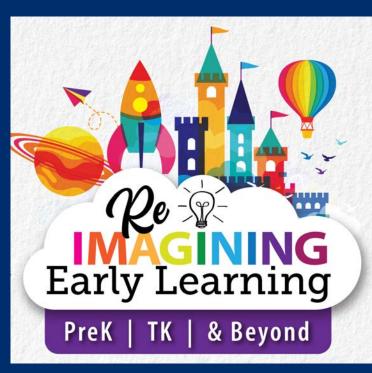
* Includes children served in ECE centers and Home Base

** With voucher, includes children who are served in licensed private centers, family child care homes, or with a family, friend, or neighbor.



Prekindergarten (UPK) support program designed to assist districts in staffing needs as they prepare for the state's new requirement: all local education agencies that offer a kindergarten program must also offer a transitional kindergarten (TK) program to all four-year-olds by 2025-26.

TCOE's UPK is creating partnerships with College of the Sequoias and Porterville College, as well as other institutions of higher education, to provide staff easy access to complete the 24 units of early childhood education coursework required to teach TK. UPK also provided professional development trainins, conferences, and monthly meetings to support districts with the TK expansion and to improve the education of the county's youngest learners.



Program

Bright Futures Burton Center Celebrates First Graduating Class

The Bright Future Burton Center celebrated its first ever graduation in June. Among the graduates was Logan Lona, who started attending the program's morning sessions in 2021 when the center first opened. At the start of the program, Logan had difficulties communicating his feelings and needs, and showed tantrum behaviors, but just two years later, he achieved his behavioral goals with the help of staff at the Burton Center.

The goal of the Burton Center is to prepare children, such as Logan, for success as they enter elementary school. The center serves children ages three to five who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by providing an opportunity to practice school-based activities. These activities include circle-time, playtime, snack time, and transitioning between activities. As children participate in these activities, they are supervised by board certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), who provide instruction and feedback to help them achieve their personalized goals. The program also offers on-site consultations and training for parents so they can help their children apply the skills they learn at the center at home.

It was services like these that helped Logan achieve his goals around communication and behavior. Thanks to the instruction of tutors like Damian Thomas, Logan and his friends are ready to start kindergarten this fall.





Logan was among the first graduating class from the Bright Future Burton Center in Porterville – a program which serves students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. While in the program, he made great progress in meeting his communication and behavioral goals. Logan is pictured left when the center opened in 2021.

Transforming Lives

Early Childhood Education Program helps single mom and her children grow and thrive



While TCOE's Early Childhood Education Program (ECE) focuses primarily on children ages zero to five, its impact goes beyond these young learners.

Liceidi Martinez, a single mom and seasonal field worker, has experienced the impact of TCOE's ECE programs firsthand. In 2020, she enrolled her oldest son in the Early Head Start program. His younger brother soon followed. Now, three years later, her life has been profoundly changed.

TCOE's Early Head Start program supports infants and toddlers from lowincome households. Offering both center- and home-based opportunities, the program provides child development services and family support. Center-based services provide childcare in an educational setting where children play and learn. The home-based services include weekly home visits to families that help parents better support child development. As children receive enrichment, their families receive parent education and referrals to health and social services.

The Head Start Program continues this support for children up to age five while also preparing them for elementary school. The federally-funded program provides health, nutrition, and social services to low-income families while also supporting educational growth for children.

Both of Martinez' sons went through the Early Head Start program at the Porterville Child Development Center. Now, her youngest is a part of the Head Start program and her oldest is starting kindergarten.

During their time in the program, the two have learned basic concepts like their shapes, colors,

and numbers. They've also developed social and emotional skills.

"I've seen a lot of growth emotionally," Martinez said. "They're connecting with each other better."

Part of this connection has to do with their new language skills. At the Porterville Center the boys got the opportunity to practice their second language: English.

"At home they only spoke Spanish." Martinez said. "Now, they both speak English to each other."

These two programs gave the Martinez boys the developmental opportunities they needed to grow while also providing Martinez with the support she needed to succeed. With her two children attending the Porterville Child Development Center, Martinez had more time to focus on her other responsibilities.

"I feel more secure knowing they're learning and playing with other kids, and they're busy so they don't miss me much," Martinez said. "I know they're in good hands."

A sense of security isn't the only benefit Martinez received from the program. The staff also provided her with resources and emotional support in a time of need. Before separating from her children's father, Martinez experienced domestic violence. When she made the decision to leave, the Child Development center's staff was there for her.

"They've been by my side helping me," Martinez said. "They reassured me that I can do this and that I'm strong. They even bought my children clothes."

After separating from her ex-partner, Martinez joined the Porterville Parent Policy Council where she served as the migrant chair. She also went back to school at Porterville College. In the fall of 2022, she graduated with two associates degrees: one in Childhood Development and one in Early Childhood Development. Now, after being inspired by one of her children's supervisors, Sheila, she is pursuing a bachelor's in family science at California State University, Fresno.

"She has been one of the people that's been my backup on everything," Martinez said. "Because of her, I went and transferred to Fresno State, and I'm getting my bachelor's now. She's been supporting me, she's been showing me resources, and she always

knows when I need to talk."

Sheila also nominated her to be recognized at the Migrant Head Start Annual Conference. After submitting a video sharing her experiences, Martinez was recognized at the conference and won a scholarship to support her studies.

<image>

Martinez has come a long way from where she was three years ago, and she attributes it to the staff at Porterville's Head Start program.

"They've made a huge impact in my life," Martinez said.

As she continues to work toward a better future for her and her children, she offers this advice:

"Speak out as a parent. Sometimes you don't want to talk about things, but I've learned that opening up and getting resources helps." "They've been by my side helping me. They reassured me that I can do this and that I'm strong."

Supporting Students with Special Needs

Academic Collaborative for Exceptional Learners (AcCEL)



Academic Collaborative for Exceptional Learners (AcCEL) serves over 1,080 students based in 81 satellite classes on school campuses and 18 center-based classes. Instruction in these special day classes is specially designed to meet the individual needs of students who have moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. Instruction takes place not only in the classroom, but also in various locations in the community where students are placed in the workforce.

This past school year, AcCEL students opened a café at the TCOE Administration Building where they make and sell coffee, pastries, sandwiches, salads, fruit cups, and more. Their delicious treats and stellar customer service are also an invaluable addition to the building and its visitors. In their work at the café, students are receiving real-world social and job skill opportunities, which will increase their independence as young adults.

During the year, students were treated to four region-based Special Olympic Games at stadiums in Porterville, Dinuba, Tulare, and Visalia. It was truly an Olympian affair with Olympic medalist and Tulare native Richard Torrez Jr. coming out to carry the torch at the Special Olympics stadium in Tulare – which is also named after Tulare Olympian, Bob Mathias.

AcCEL students wrapped up the year with three graduations held for Porterville, Tulare, and Visalia students. Tears were shed and laughs were heard as students, teachers, and families reflected on how far they'd come.



Behavioral Health Services Supports Family Mental Health Needs

Special Services' Behavioral Health Services (BHS) supports children and their families by providing mental health, behavioral, and wellness services in the school. home. and community. By utilizing evidencebased approaches and drawing upon the strengths, diversity, and resiliency of the families they serve, BHS works to remove barriers impeding the achievement of their goals.

Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, BHS serviced 1,404

students through the Mental Wellness Triage Grant, 924 students through the Mental Health Student Services Act Grant, and 635 students who have educationallyrelated mental health services (ERMHS) as part of their Individual Education Plan. BHS school social workers also served 1,469 students through contracts with schools.

BHS extended their reach of support far into the community by holding 108 trainings and 328 outreach events that reached over 10,000 students, parents, staff, and professionals.

Teachers and parents who are looking for behavioral health or other mental wellness resources are encouraged to visit tcoe.org/BHS



10,000+

Students, parents, staff and professionals reached through 108 trainings and 328 community outreach events

<u>432</u> Students who received mental health

and / or social worker services through various Behavioral Health Services programs

An alternative approach

Students at AAP learn about themselves through animals and gardens



Success always looks different from person to person or even from program to program. At TCOE's Alternative Achievement Program (AAP), success may look like a student covered in chicken feathers or a bowl of freshly picked berries.

AAP provides services to students in grades 6-12 with behavioral and socialemotional needs.

Within an alternative and therapeutic learning environment, students at AAP receive support from embedded mental health services and AAP staff who focus on individually meeting each student's educational needs.

"We are all very different people, and we don't all learn in the same way," said Tammy Bradford, TCOE's Assistant Superintendent of Special Services. "Some students need an alternative to the typical (school) setting, and this works for those students. They start to enjoy education and start to realize, 'Hey, I can do this!' And then they start to succeed."

Two unique ways staff and students at AAP

have found success is through the inclusion of livestock and animal care and a studentbuilt garden where vegetables and berries are cared for and harvested. Through these experiences, students practice social and coping skills that they can take back to their comprehensive school sites.

As of summer 2023, AAP is home to four rabbits and nine chickens. These animals – along with the support of an on-site Behavioral Health Services rehabilitation specialist, a group Mindfulness Room, and an individual Therapy Room – help students develop their ability to be more aware of their emotions and proactive about how they handle them.

"What I really like is that you'll see students request a break, go out and engage with the animals, and then return at the end of the break ready to engage in class again," said Ben Bolin, one of the AAP school psychologists. "One of my favorite moments this year was watching one of our students request a break, let himself into the chicken pen where he picked up one of our Buff Brahma hens, and then spent his break laying down on his back with that hen nestled down on his chest. He had to brush the feathers and bark off of himself afterward, but was he in a calmer state? Yes! Definitely."

"It changes their mindset," Bradford said. "It's therapeutic for them, and suddenly they're out there thinking about the animals instead of what was troubling them in the first place. And it's just calming."

Landry is a sixth-grade student at AAP who enjoys playing basketball and watching football. But when he needs to experience

a sense of calm, he will independently request a break and go see the animals.

"It helps me relax. I like seeing animals," said Landry. Pearl, an Angora rabbit, is his favorite to visit. He likes her because she's fluffy and listens well.

"Any time I say, 'Come here,' she comes to me," Landry said. "Sometimes she will scratch me, but that's OK. I still care for her. It's a nervous thing."

Using the care of animals to help foster a student's emotional and mental health is an experience AAP recognizes isn't commonplace, but they're thankful to provide.

"There are not any other sites that I know of, where if a student is struggling, they have the opportunity to take such a unique break," Bolin said. "Go spend a few minutes with the chickens or rabbits to gather themselves and then come on back. It is very unique, and I'm thankful that we get the opportunity to offer it."

Walking around the AAP campus, it's easy to see the many opportunities available to students to experience something different that positively impacts their mindset and sense of belonging. One of the most visible is the project-based learning, student-built garden.

The garden was a blank canvas of bark mulch when the students first arrived. However, they quickly set out to measure the area, clear the bark, dig holes for posts, put down pavers, and help assemble planter beds supplied by the TCOE Nutrition Education Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Program.

"I believe having been a part of this from the start gives our students a greater sense of belonging," Bolin said. "I believe with our students there is the thought that, 'This place didn't look like this when I first got here, and now look at what I've had a hand in.' I think there is a big sense of satisfaction



and belonging with these students."

The planter beds are now filled with tomatoes, peppers, squash, corn, and pumpkins, and students have already used what they've grown as ingredients for salsa, quesadillas, and side dishes in AAP's elective cooking class.

In their work with animals and the garden, students are learning how to collaborate on projects and recognize the needs of someone other than themselves – which are essential life lessons for them to take into the classroom and the future.

Some of these lessons have already resonated with Landry. At the end of the 2023 school year, Landry's mom wrote a note to the staff, praising them for helping her son have his "best year ever."

This upcoming school year, students and staff will continue to reap the rewards of their hard work and care of their campus. The blueberries and raspberries will be ripe when students return, and preparation for the season's next harvest will begin. "We are all very different people, and we don't all learn in the same way. Some students need an alternative to the typical (school) setting, and this works for those students."

Inspiring Students

We are enormously proud of the supplemental programs and extracurricular activities we provide for Tulare County students. Science education is supplemented at two outstanding programs, SCICON and its Circle J-Norris Ranch field study site, and the Planetarium & Science Center. The Theatre Company provides spring workshops and its flourishing OnStage program, which brings traveling productions to dozens of schools around the county each year.

Student Future Ready Events

In addition, we offer the widest array of student events found in California. These activities and events meet the California State Standards to help inspire students of all ages. Take a look at some of our student event highlights from this year.



Poetry Live!

Audrey Reis, a senior at Mission Oak High School in Tulare, was crowned Tulare County's first-ever Youth Poet Laureate after winning the Poet's Own Voice competition. This competition is a part of the Poetry Live! program. In it, students submit five original works to be evaluated by judges. Judges then determine each of the poet's best work, which students then perform live.

Reis' performance was especially captivating as she pulled out her ukulele to accompany an ode she composed.

As Youth Poet Laureate, Reis will serve as an ambassador and advocate for the art of poetry by visiting schools and community organizations.

Youth Poet Laureate Audrey Reis performs her ode while playing the ukulele.



Math Super Bowl

Math Super Bowl celebrated its **50th anniversary** on March 23, 2023. This Tulare County created event brings seventh- and eighth-grade students together to compete in mathematics challenges. These challenges involve students working to solve problems individually, in teams with students from other schools, and in teams with students from their own school. This year, 700 students participated from 41 different schools.

Participants work together with competitors from other schools in the Pro Bowl portion of the competition.



Academic Decathlon Tulare County held its annual Academic Decathlon on February 4, with Harmony Magnet Academy taking first place. The team went on to represent Tulare County at the state competition March 24-26. Harmony Magnet came home well-decorated. Juniors Allison Daguman and Jamie Wilkinson won gold and bronze, respectively, in Division III Interviews. Team captain and senior Jay Dillion received an honor cord for highest overall score on the team.

From left to right: Allison Daguman, Janie Wilkinson, and Jay Dillion of Harmony Magnet Academy.

Tulare County not only participates in major state academic competitions, but is home to 29 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. Learn more at tcoe.org/StudentEvents.

SCICON School of Science & Conservation

15,184

Fifth and sixth-grade students and teachers attended for a day or week-long visit to experience hands-on environmental science lessons and 60 years of SCICON traditions

Researchers and students from UC Merced, UC Davis, Fresno State, and CSU Long Beach utilized the UC Merced/SCICON Field Station



4,039

Students and educators participated in field science curriculum, stargazing, birdwatching, and oak forest restoration



College and Career Readiness

Our College and Career Readiness (CCR) department works with local school districts to ensure students are college and career ready by providing training and access to career-based learning experiences. The department consists of 16 school districts, and the Tulare and Kings county offices of education. CCR also partners with six colleges, two county workforce investment boards and over 200 industry partners. This year, **nearly 1,400 students** participated in special events, including **Trades Day, College & Career EXPO**, and **Growing Health Leaders**. Various **teacher and counselor events** included the **Counselor Conference** and numerous **Industry Sector Summits** – events attended by **325 educators**.

Planetarium & Science Center

10,083

Central Valley students attended a science-based program in the planetarium





Turning a passion into a career

Through work experience with the Theatre Company, performer charts a course toward teaching

"In five years, I'd like to be teaching theatre arts in a program like the Theatre Company, where I could see all grade levels having the same experience I had." The staff and volunteers of the Theatre Company are masterful at transforming students into characters – princes, witches, ogres, and mermaids – for productions that have delighted local audiences for over 25 years. Once in the fall and once during the summer, directors, choreographers, vocal coaches, makeup artists, and costumers guide ordinary Tulare County students into roles that – with a little theatre magic – become complete realizations of the writers' vision. And audiences fall for them.

After the production closes though, the princes, witches, ogres, and mermaids go back to being regular teens with responsibilities for their academics, the demands of their friends and families, and wondering about the future.

But sometimes, the transformation is more permanent. Sometimes, the theatre magic doesn't wear off.

Lyra Paez is one such transformation. The second-year student at College of the Sequoias has been performing in Theatre Company productions since 2017. She was introduced to the program when she watched some friends perform in the 2016 production of Les Misérables. She recalled, "My friends talked about how intense the

rehearsals were, but also how rewarding they were." She was hooked. Paez auditioned and was

cast in the spring 2017 production of James and the Giant Peach and didn't miss a show through the completion of her senior year at Golden West High School (Visalia) in 2022.

As a child, she enjoyed dance. "I liked the Wiggles and would recreate their dances," she laughed. "Eventually I began to create my own." By seven, Paez was at the Sierra Performing Arts Center, working with McKenna Friend-Hoffman, who is now the Theatre Company's choreographer.

Off to COS in the fall of 2022 as a kinesiology major, Paez remained connected to the Theatre Company through OnStage, the traveling turn-key production which a dozen Tulare County elementary and middle schools hired last year to create a show in two to three weeks. As an OnStage director, Paez crisscrossed the county to bring live theatre to Hope School (Porterville), St. Paul's School (Visalia), Strathmore Elementary and Palm Elementary (Orosi) – loving the students' first-time enthusiasm and the challenge of directing them.

While at COS, Paez also found time to star as Emma Carew in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Somewhere amidst all the directing and the acting, the kinesiology major became a theatre major. "I never imagined I would make a commitment to an arts major," she laughed. "But I felt like I wasn't finished yet with the theater. It's strange to refer to myself as an actress/choreographer."

In June, Paez, along with Theatre Company alums Tessa Hemphill and Rahim Pullom, rolled right into their roles as directors of the Theatre Company's three-week summer camp, which was built around a production of *Winnie the Pooh JR*.

Paez's mornings were devoted to working with elementary students enrolled in the summer camp. During her afternoons, she choreographed students who were cast in the preshow portion of the Theatre



Company's summer musical, *Into The Woods*, which was performed in July. Paez and Hemphill created the choreography for the *Once Upon A Time* preshow, working with the Theatre Company's Charlotte Garcia Da Rosa.

In sharing her experience directing young performers and choreographing productions, Paez often talked with enthusiasm about the rewards of her work. "For the preshow production, I was able to sit in on the creative process, which was so rewarding," she said. "It's crazy how much it's impacted me. If you would have asked me a few years ago, I couldn't have imagined it. But working with Charlotte, Bethany (Rader), and McKenna, it's been so rewarding to be on this side of the production, directing the performers."

After another year at COS, Paez plans to transfer to a four-year theater arts program at a university. "In five years, I'd like to be teaching theatre arts in a program like the Theatre Company, where I could see all grade levels having the same experience I had," she smiled.

Paez's transformation from performer to teacher is nearly complete thanks to the guidance of caring educators who saw her enthusiasm and talent, and had the vision to entrust her with responsibilities that ignited her passion for a career in theatre.

Keeping Students Safe

Last school year, TCOE created the new School Safety Program entirely dedicated to assisting districts with the prevention, assessment, and response to school threats. The department offers three key services – the Sandy Hook Promise Say Something Anonymous Reporting System, threat assessment trainings utilizing the methods of John Van Dreal Consulting, and the ActVnet crisis response system.



ActVnet Crisis Response System

Developed in partnership with multiple law enforcement agencies, ActVnet is a crisis response system that is intended to improve emergency response processes as well as school safety and security. As of September 2023, 23 Tulare County school districts – totaling 86 schools – are under contract for ActVnet services with several others, inside and outside of the county, soon to be added.

The web-based system gives law enforcement real-time access to live camera feeds from school sites, allowing them to immediately gain situational awareness in the case of an emergency. Along with parents and school staff, Tulare County fire, law enforcement, medical, and mental health agencies have expressed their universal support for the ActVnet system.

Say Something Anonymous Reporting System



In partnering with the Sandy Hook Promise, our School Safety Program provides the Say Something Anonymous Reporting System.

Say Something combines education about the warning signs of potential violence or self-harm with the tools to safely report concerns. After a tip is reported, a crisis counselor privately reviews it and gathers more information before taking the next step, which could be contacting law enforcement or school administrators. Say Something is the only anonymous reporting system in the U.S. that provides training along with a mobile app, website, and hotline – exclusively for schools.

Twenty-five of our school districts have implemented the system, and 13 more are completing the training and implementing the new program in the next few months.

At the end of the school year, 323 tips had been reported with 293 tips determined to be non-life threatening.



Top 5 tip types reported in Tulare County on Say Something system during 2022-23 school year:

Bullying (81) Drug use (27) Self harm (24) Harassment (22) Anger issues (21)

Our Schools TCOE Charter Schools



La Sierra Charter School 1735 E. Houston Ave., Visalia Grades: 7-12

La Sierra offers a military program where middle and high school cadets focus on military etiquette, physical fitness, and

eadership development. The school is a member of the California Cadet Corps. An independent studies program is also offered. 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 core academics designed to prepare them for college. The school also offers a robust arts program with choir, orchestra, hand bells, guitar, and theatre arts opportunities.

Court/Community Schools



TCOE operates two community schools – Mid-County (Visalia) and Superior (Tulare) – for students who have been expelled from their home district. The schools provide a credit recovery program and a robust career technical education (CTE) program, including building trades 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.

The CTE work students did was showcased in various ways throughout TCOE last school year. Mid-County students built planter boxes and started gardens that beautified their campus. They also created an outdoor vendor spot and opened the M.C. Café at TCOE's Doe Avenue Complex where they make and sell coffee, tea, smoothies, sandwiches, salads, fruit cups, cookies, and more. Just before the summer, Superior students delivered a large, hand-built chicken coop to the Alternative Achievement Program (AAP) for housing their animals.

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

12

families by providing academic resources, extracurricular activities, and instructional support.

The Academies

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 School

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.

Looking Forward!

Four new projects we'll be working on during the 2023-2024 school year



UPK Mixed Delivery Planning Grant

This year, the California Department of Education awarded TCOE a Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Mixed Delivery Planning Grant. This grant will be used to create a plan that increases access to full-day Pre-K programs for three- and four-year-olds.

The term "mixed-delivery" refers to the types of full-day Pre-K programs that will be included under the plan. Under a mixed delivery system, a wider variety of early childhood education programs are recognized. As such, the grant will support traditional preschools provided through public and private schools, as well as home and community-based childcare centers.

The grant has already been used to form a local UPK work group and hire two educational consultants. Together, the work group and TCOE are conducting countywide surveys and focus groups to better understand community needs. In upcoming years, the findings from this research will be used to create the UPK master plan, which will help program providers better understand and meet the needs of our community.



Project AWARE

In October of 2022, TCOE was awarded a five-year federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) grant. Partnering with the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) and the California Department of Education, the grant was used to create Project AWARE. The project's goal is to serve the students of Tulare County by promoting mental health awareness through community events, campus clubs, and student-developed social media content. In the first year of the grant, Project AWARE held 32 awareness events, and launched its own Instagram and YouTube accounts.

Another element of the grant is the placement of counselors at 10 Tulare County districts – Burton, Cutler-Orosi, Dinuba, Exeter, Palo Verde, Pixley, Porterville, Strathmore, Tulare City, and Waukena. Now hired, they will be used by their districts to serve the mental health needs of their students. This year, Project AWARE will also focus on the development of school mental health clubs and further outreach.



Student Athlete Recognition

Sportsmanship is valued at the highest level in our county. The Pursuing Victory with Honor (PVWH) program works alongside others, including local Kiwanis clubs and the Visalia Rawhide, a Minor League Baseball club, to honor student-athletes who pursue victory with honor during and outside of competition.

For the upcoming school year, those in the field of sports will be celebrated on a large scale with a dinner at the end of the school year. Two athletes from every high school will be recognized for

their sportsmanship, awards for Coach of the Year and Athletic Director of the Year will be given out, and winners of the Provident-Salierno Pursuing Victory with Honor Scholarship will be announced. Alongside last year's first-ever studentathlete conferences, this dinner will be an annual night to celebrate and encourage the continued efforts of athletes, coaches, and athletic directors modeling good sportsmanship.

School Counselor Residency Capacity Grant

The California Center on Teaching Careers (The Center), which is housed within the Tulare County Office of Education, was one of four LEAs in the state to be awarded a School Counselor Residency Capacity Grant by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The grant, which was developed in partnership with Fresno Pacific University's School of Education, will be used to design and implement a new school counselor residency model in collaboration with three Tulare County school districts – Burton School District, Farmersville Unified School District, and Visalia Unified School District.

The first phase of funding is intended to support local efforts to recruit, develop support systems for, provide outreach and communication strategies to, and retain a diverse school counseling workforce that reflects Tulare County's diversity. This program will emphasize preparing candidates to provide prevention and intervention strategies to remove barriers to learning for all children and to assist PK-12 students in achieving their personal potential.

With three current residency programs in place, The Center has been a model for the state in building similar teacher and school-based mental health professional residency programs. This is coupled with TCOE's already strong support for school counselors through various grant programs. TCOE is anticipating further funding opportunities to be a part of a statewide effort to build a strong pipeline and system of support for quality school counselors to bolster all PK-12 students in Tulare County schools.









Tulare County Office of Education 6200 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia, CA 93277 (559) 733-7300 tcoe.org

AcCEL Program **Behavioral Health Services** Bright Start Parent / Infant Program **Business Services** California Center on Teaching Careers California Friday Night Live Partnership **CHARACTER COUNTS! CHOICES After School Programs CHOICES** Prevention/Intervention Education College and Career Readiness **Court/Community Schools** Early Childhood Education Program **Educational Resource Services** Foster & Homeless Youth Education Human Resources La Sierra Military Academy Leadership Support Services **Migrant Education** New Teacher & Leadership Development Nutrition Education Obesity Prevention Planetarium and Science Center Region VII System of Support for Expanded Learning School Health Programs School Safety Program SCICON Outdoor Education Services for Education & Employment (SEE) **Special Services Student Future Ready Events** Theatre Company and OnStage Program University Preparatory High School