

TCOE programs plan for modified graduations

Traditionally, students in TCOE's charter schools and special education classes would begin to graduate this week. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, administrators at La Sierra Charter School, University Preparatory High School (UPHS), the Special Services AcCEL Programs and Community Based Instruction Classrooms (CBICs), and the Court/Community Schools have made other plans to celebrate the accomplishments 140 young people made during a difficult year.

Sarah Hamilton, AcCEL administrator, reports that the program has 54 graduates this year from centers in Yettam, Visalia, Tulare, and Porterville and the 10 CBICs throughout the county. Students in the CBICs have been working to develop key life skills, such as character development, money management, personal health and fitness, and communication, navigation and job skills. The goal of the program, which supports students with special needs ages 18-22, is to prepare them to live as independently as possible following their graduations. Earlier this month, program staff delivered certificates of completion and yard signs to the graduates.



For the fifth year in a row, the Court/Community School program will graduate students. This year, two students will receive their diplomas. Since 2016, the program has partnered with Instructional Access, a widely-used online resource, to enable students to complete needed courses at a pace that meets their learning style and to fulfill their graduation requirements.



La Sierra Charter Schools will graduate 27 students. Principal Anjelica Zermeño reports that the school is in the process of creating a video which will serve to commemorate the event. Last week, students visited the campus individually in their caps and gowns to be filmed walking onto Patriot Field. The videos will be edited together and will feature announcements of La Sierra's numerous scholarships and select student speeches, including remarks by valedictorian Asly Martinez. Earlier this month, Asly was surprised to learn she would be the class valedictorian through a Zoom meeting with teachers and administrators. La Sierra plans to distribute its diplomas to students individually on June 5.

The 2020 class of University Preparatory High School (UPHS) is preparing to graduate in a modified ceremony at Gateway Church in Visalia on May 28 and 29. Each senior and their family members will arrive at their designated time in one vehicle. At their appointed time, the graduate will exit their vehicle to hear their name announced, receive their diploma, and have their photo taken.

Eric Thiessen, principal of UPHS, reports that school staff will integrate the graduates' photos into a video featuring remarks by Mr. Thiessen and speeches by select students. This year, UPHS is graduating 57 students, 10 of whom have simultaneously earned their associates degree from College of the Sequoias (COS). The UPHS Class of 2020 valedictorians are: Edward Escobar, Aubrey Liddi, Eileen Xue, and Alyssa Zamora. UPHS salutatorians include Joshua Calvendra, Victoria Davila, Kole Devereaux, Cassidy Dodge, Corina Feenstra, Maya Fernandez-Arias, Daniel Glick, Angelina Gomez, Lauren Hizon, Emily Jackson, Megan Lacy, Savannah Ramirez, Trinity Reimer, Brittney Santos, Angel Silva, Cameron Tobin, and Claire Toomey.



“I couldn't be prouder of the Class of 2020,” said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. “While your senior year wasn't like those in previous classes, you have persevered in

difficult times to meet your goals. You've learned how to be successful in a distance learning environment. You've learned to manage your time and to be creative when faced with obstacles. The good character and personal resilience you have shown will serve you well as you advance to make important decisions about college and career."

Photos above:

~ Students in Special Services' AcCEL programs recently received their certificates of completion and yards signs to celebrate their achievement. Pictured is Rylee Bejarano, a graduate of the Community Based Instruction Classroom at College of the Sequoias in Visalia.

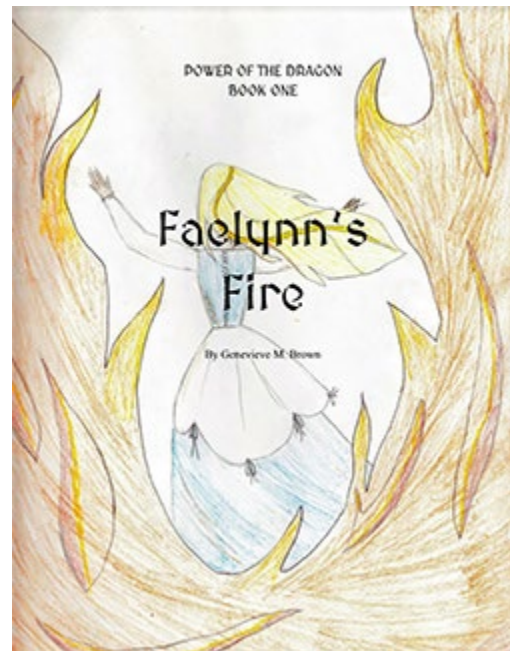
~ La Sierra's Jennifer Elizondo is one of the school's 27 seniors who visited the campus individually to be filmed for a commemorative graduation video.

~ Eileen Xue is one of University Preparatory High School's four valedictorians. The school is holding modified graduations for seniors this week.

Virtual Young Authors' Faire attracts impressive entries

Every spring, the Tulare County Office of Education invites students to participate in the annual Young Authors' Faire (YAF). This student event offers budding writers in grades K-8 an opportunity to showcase their work at the county level and be recognized in a variety of genres. Typically, exemplary submissions from county schools are displayed at the administration building for visitors to read and provide comments.

Plans for the 2020 evening reception included a visit from Juana Martinez-Neal, Newberry Honor winner for her book, *Alma and How She Got Her Name*. With the pandemic causing an interruption in typical school schedules, classroom work, and large group gatherings, YAF quickly became a virtual event. With submissions due earlier this month, the virtual YAF received three books – two from Three Rivers Union School and one from Masaer Academy Homeschool.



Power of the Dragon/Book One: Faelynn's Fire by Genevieve Brown from Masaer Academy is a finely crafted, detailed, and imaginative story that tops 200 pages. *Faelynn's Fire* is a thrilling tale set amidst a brewing invasion by the Anerecs Republic on Damaecura. After being kidnapped along with her brother and secret love Williem, young Faelynn meets Willow, another girl with special powers that will enable them to free the dragons so peace can rule once again in Damaecura. As the story unfolds, Faelynn learns the value of the priceless star necklace her grandmother gave her before she died. This beautifully written fantasy follows two strong girls who are destined to change the outcome of an impending invasion.

Sixth-grade students Audrey Das and Abby Nesmith from Ms. Thorn’s class at Three Rivers Union School submitted a 90-page, co-written story. In their fantasy book, the reader follows the story of Luxavens, mythical creatures completely composed of light. Audrey and Abby explain in their book titled *Captured: Book 1 of Light Light Everywhere*, “They look like large birds, aside from the fact that they appear to be made of fire. When a Luxaven’s light touches something else, it spreads to that thing in the form of fire.”

Also from Ms. Thorn’s sixth-grade class came a 118-page submission by Anna Villavicencio and Alice Warner titled *Ladybug*. This story follows seventh grader Izabelle as she navigates the challenges that arise when a popular new girl arrives, threatening to come between Izabelle and her best friend, Leslie. Readers will empathize with the main character as misunderstandings, assumptions, and hopes are challenged throughout the story, including a surprise ending that includes a kitten named Ladybug. “Anna and Alice did an outstanding job developing the plot, adding clear dialogue, and providing a detailed picture of the main characters,” said Debra Lockwood, ERS library media supervisor.

To enjoy these detailed, well composed and crafted stories, visit tcoe.org/YoungAuthorsFaire.

The 2021 Young Authors’ Faire will be held Thursday, April 22, at the TCOE Conference Center and will include a visit by author Rafael Lopez.

Photo above:

~ Faelynn’s Fire is a book created for the virtual Young Authors’ Faire by Genevieve Brown from Masaer Academy Homeschool. Faelynn’s Fire and other titles entered in the program are available to read at tcoe.org/YoungAuthorsFaire.

CHOICES receives three-year grant to continue its tobacco sales enforcement work



In August, the CHOICES Program will begin work on a three-year grant focusing on the enforcement of tobacco laws pertaining to its illegal purchase or use by young people under the age of 21. Awarded in March, the Stop Tobacco Access to Kids Enforcement (STAKE) Grant was provided by the California Department of Public Health. The Tulare County Office of Education was the only county office of education in the state to receive the grant.

Similar to the programs developed over the past two years through several California Department of Justice grants, CHOICES and a law enforcement partner will work with local retailers to ensure they are compliant with tobacco sales laws to those under 21. A CHOICES specialist will also work with partner schools and communities to deliver presentations to build awareness of these laws with the goal of reducing tobacco use and sales in rural Tulare County. CHOICES and its law enforcement partner will conduct both compliance reviews and tobacco-related enforcement operations targeting licensed retailers annually. To measure its effectiveness in reducing tobacco and vape use among students and young adults, the CHOICES specialists will utilize student-reported data from future California Healthy Kids Surveys. The team will also work with local government to enact two important policy changes focused on minor tobacco/e-cigarette use in Tulare County.

Photo above:

~ The CHOICES Program recently received a tobacco enforcement grant from the California Department of Public Health. The grant continues the work that CHOICES and partner law enforcement agencies have done with local retailers and students over the past two years through grants from the California Department of Justice.

Distance Learning Resources

- [Arts All Around Us](#)
- [TCOE Learning at Home](#)

Coming Up!

- Many upcoming student events have been cancelled or postponed. Check the current list of all student events (cancelled, postponed, and tentatively scheduled) on the [Student Events](#) webpage.

View more events at tcoe.org/CalendarofEvents.

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To receive *News Gallery Week*, visit tcoe.org/GetTheGallery, or contact Jennifer Fisher at jenniferf@tcoe.org or (559) 733-6172.
