

# news galleryweek

December 17, 2025

## Sunnyside wins inaugural TCOE Esports League Winter Tournament



The first-ever Tulare County Esports League Winter Tournament took place this past Saturday with 10 teams from across the county participating in the inaugural event.

Teams went head-to-head playing Rocket League in a 3v3 single-elimination showdown, showcasing skill, teamwork, and sportsmanship. After nine matches, teams from Sunnyside Union School (Strathmore) and Sundale Union Elementary School (Tulare) faced off in the championship match with Sunnyside coming out on top as the tournament's first-ever winner. They received a trophy and medals for their victory.

“The win meant a lot to our students,” said Sunnyside’s coach Vicente Soto. “They have put in a great deal of time practicing and working to improve specific aspects of the game. Seeing their hard work pay off was very rewarding, and the students were extremely excited and proud of what they accomplished.”

This was only Sunnyside’s fourth month having an esports team, and Soto thanked his school staff for the support that helped bring home the win.

“Thank you to everyone who helped make this event possible for our students,” said Soto. “We are thankful for the continued support of our staff and administration. Their support played a big role in creating such a positive and memorable experience.”

Also receiving medals were Sundale’s Blue Team, which placed second, and its White Team, which placed third after defeating Palo Verde Union Elementary School (Tulare). Also participating in the tournament were Divisadero Middle School (Visalia), Roosevelt Elementary School (Tulare), and Carl Smith Middle School (Terra Bella).



The Tulare County Esports League was created in response to the growth of esports in schools across the nation. In 2020, esports was officially recognized as a high school sport by the California Interscholastic Federation – California’s governing body of sport.

“Since its inception, the league has seen a surge in participation from schools throughout the Central Valley,” said Doug Cairns, an instructional technology specialist for TCOE. “This expansion offers a unique platform for students who may not participate in conventional athletics to represent their campuses with pride. Beyond the screen, participants engage in leadership roles and technical management, gaining

experience that translates directly to the modern workforce. We are committed to providing the resources and infrastructure necessary to sustain this momentum for years to come."

The middle school Esports League Tournaments are one of over 40 Student Future Ready Events offered through TCOE. The spring tournament is set for May 16, 2026, and an increased number of teams and schools are expected to participate.

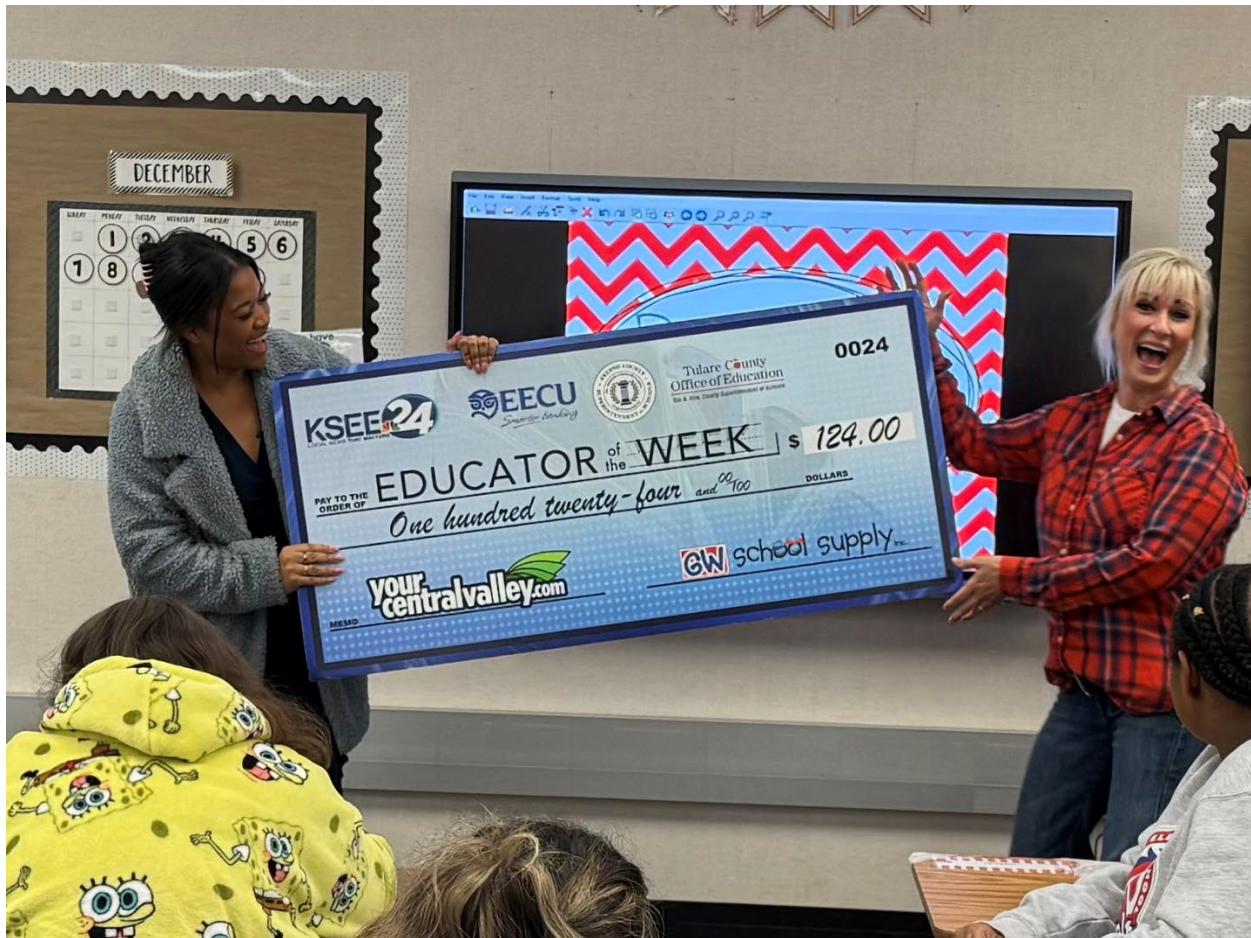
For more information on the Tulare County Esports League, visit [tcoe.org/esports](http://tcoe.org/esports). For more on esports in Tulare County, contact Doug Cairns at [doug.cairns@tcoe.org](mailto:doug.cairns@tcoe.org).

Photos above:

~ Sunnyside Union School (top) won the inaugural Tulare County Esports League Winter Tournament on Saturday, December 13, 2025. Teams went head-to-head (bottom) in 3v3 matches of Rocket League.

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## Shanna Brisendine named KSEE24 Educator of the Week



Last week, Shanna Brisendine was surprised to learn that she was selected as a KSEE24 Educator of the Week. Brisendine is an AcCEL teacher at Maple Elementary School in Tulare. Nominated by a parent of one of her students, she was commended for her engaging, interactive style of teaching students with special needs.

Brisendine's approach has seen results. "I've seen it time and time again where they start to blossom," she said. "I heard a kiddo that was nonverbal say 'happy' for the first time, and it was just like, oh my goodness, you get far more than you give."

As part of her award, Brisendine received a \$124.00 gift certificate to GW School Supply and will be honored at a ceremony at Fresno State along with all of the 2025-26 Educators of the Week this spring. To see a video of Shanna Brisendine receiving her award, visit: <https://www.yourcentralvalley.com/community/eotw/educator-of-the-week-ms-brisendine-of-maple-elementary/>.

*Photo above:*

~ Shanna Brisendine, right, receives a \$124.00 gift certificate to GW School Supply as part of her award as the KSEE24 Educator of the Week. Brisendine is an AcCEL teacher at Maple Elementary School in Tulare.

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## Annual CAC calendar celebrates students with special needs building resilience through the performing arts

The annual Community Advisory Committee (CAC) calendars are out and being distributed across the county to schools, clinics, and community organizations. For over 30 years, the calendar has highlighted the needs and abilities of students with special needs in Tulare County.



This year's calendar is entitled "Meeting Challenges: Resilience Through Creativity" and showcases students with special needs benefitting from involvement in the performing arts. "Arts education has the unique ability to transform the ordinary into something vibrant and inspiring," the calendar says. "The performing arts take this transformation a step further, offering students the chance to actively showcase their talents to peers, families, and the broader community – promoting inclusion and fostering a sense of empowerment."

One story features Guadalupe Santillan, a dedicated member of Woodlake Union High School's Ballet Folklorico Tierra y Sol group for the past two years. Santillan's dance instructor, Lisa Perez, says that she is consistent in her attendance at practices and community performances, positive, kind, and respectful. She is a joy to watch dance.

State education code established the creation of CACs. In Tulare County, this 16-member committee is comprised of parents of students with special needs, parents of general education students, general and special education teachers, representatives from community agencies, and a student or adult with special needs.



For more information on the CAC and its work, visit [tulareselpa.org/cac](http://tulareselpa.org/cac).

*Photo above:*

~ *Guadalupe Santillan is featured in the annual CAC calendar, which this year celebrates students with special needs excelling in the performing arts. Santillan is a junior at Woodlake Union High School and a member of the school's folklorico dance group.*

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## New state and federal directors graduate from biennial institute



The Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE), through its Leadership Support Services (LSS) department, wrapped up a four-day New State and Federal Directors Institute last week. Offered every other year, this professional learning opportunity supports first-time directors, aspiring administrators, and experienced directors seeking a refresher in state and federal program requirements.

The Institute focused on the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and California state programs, with an emphasis on federal requirements for Title programs and the alignment of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), and the English Learner Roadmap. Participants gained practical guidance to support effective planning and budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs at both the district and school-site levels.

Through this focused and foundational learning experience, LSS continues its commitment to building leadership capacity and supporting high-quality, student-centered programs that meet legal requirements across the county.

Graduates included:

Rafael Aguilar, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools  
Phil Black, Porterville Unified School District  
Jackie Everett, Tipton School District  
Veronica Faria-Percival, Tulare City School District  
Cesiah Magdaleno, Porterville Unified School District  
Dustin McNearney, Tulare City School District  
Gina Melkonian, Dinuba Unified School District  
Helen Milliorn-Feller, Tulare County Office of Education

For more information about ways LSS can support your school or district, contact Gabriela Guzman, Leadership Support Services administrator, at [gabriela.guzman@tcoe.org](mailto:gabriela.guzman@tcoe.org).

*Photo above:*

*~ Last week, a number of district directors of state and federal programs graduated from a four-day leadership institute organized by the Leadership Support Services department.*

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Editor: [Robert Herman](#), Communications Director

Contributors: Nayirah Dosu, Jennifer Fisher, Jaime Burnitzki, Paula Terrill, Doug Cairns, Kim Korenwinder, Gabriela Guzman

To receive the News Gallery Week, sign up [here](#), or contact Jennifer Fisher at [jenniferf@tcoe.org](mailto:jenniferf@tcoe.org) or (559) 733-6172.