

Thirty-eight staff members retire this year, providing over 800 years of service to Tulare County students

This afternoon, a number of employees who retired during the current school year or plan to retire this month attended a meeting of the Tulare County Board of Education where they were congratulated on their years of service to TCOE.

This year, a total of 38 teachers, administrators, and support staff retired with 822 years of service to Tulare County students and school districts.

“Our retirees devoted an average of over 21 years each to our programs – from Early Childhood Education and Special Services to Migrant Education,” said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. “We appreciate their dedication to the students of Tulare County and wish each of them a happy and healthy retirement!”

Below is a brief summary of each retiree as submitted by their supervisors and coworkers:

2024-25 Tulare County Office of Education retirees

Tisha Alvarez, Early Childhood Education Program, Home Base Supervisor, 34 years



After 34 years of dedicated service, Tisha Alvarez is stepping into a well-earned retirement. Throughout her time with the Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP), Alvarez made a positive impact on the many families and staff she worked with. She consistently demonstrated what true leadership and dedication looks like by sincerely caring for everyone around her.

Alvarez served as a center supervisor and, most recently, a home base supervisor, responsible for training her home educators, and planning training sessions, curriculum, and educational activities for the families they serve.

ECEP colleagues say, "While we're excited for what lies ahead, it's impossible not to feel bittersweet saying goodbye to someone who has meant so much to this organization. Congratulations on your retirement, Tisha!"

Carolyn Angulo, Early Childhood Education Program, Records Clerk, 26 years



After 26 years of serving Tulare County's Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP), Carol Angulo is retiring. Angulo began with TCOE in 1999 as a records clerk. For the past 26 years, she dedicated herself to maintaining and organizing student records at various ECEP child development centers, including Senaida Garcia, La Sierra, Traver, Maple, Cutler, and Dinuba. Throughout her time with TCOE, she worked with many staff and families to build lifelong friendships and provide much-needed support.

Two of her own grandchildren were enrolled at Dinuba Child Development Center and the Senaida Garcia Center during her career.

ECEP wishes Carol well on her new journey.

Leticia Aranzazu, Early Childhood Education Program, Kitchen Supervisor, 26 years



Leticia Aranzazu is finishing her journey with TCOE's Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP) after 26 years of employment and 39 years of service. The parent of four children who also attended the program, Aranzazu started out as a volunteer in her child's classroom in 1986. Then, in 1995, she began substitute teaching at the Cutler Child Development Center. Three years later, ECEP hired Aranzazu as a cook, and she began providing staff members and children at the Cutler and North Visalia centers with nourishing food. Her love for the children was evident in the food she prepared each day. Eventually, after 21 years of service, Aranzazu became Cutler's kitchen manager, where she stayed for the remainder of her career.

ECEP staff is excited to see what retirement holds for Leticia.

Theresa Benavente, Early Childhood Education Program, Home Educator, 36 years



After serving as a home educator for the past 36 years and leaving a lasting impact on many families, Theresa Benavente is entering retirement. The Head Start program is special to her because her father, Ralph Garcia, worked alongside Senaida Garcia to establish the program in Tulare County. She chose to follow in her father's footsteps.

It takes a big heart to teach little minds, and Theresa Benavente truly has a big heart. Over the years, she has blessed numerous families with her warmth, knowledge, and dedication, conducting multiple home visits per week. During these visits she would provide parents with information on education, social services, parent involvement, health and safety, nutrition, child development, and family wellness. Benavente also modeled how parents can help children learn routine activities.

ECEP staff wish Theresa many new adventures, filled with joy and cherished memories of her time with the Head Start program.

Ana Borba, Credentialed School Nurse, School Health Programs, 24 years

Ana Borba has served as a Credentialed School Nurse in the School Health Programs since March 2001. During her time in School Health Programs, she supported a variety of small school districts throughout Tulare County. For the past 20 years, she provided full-time health care services to students, families, and school staff at Alta Vista Elementary in Porterville. Ana is a strong advocate for health and safety, which is well-respected as she holds multiple committee positions on the school's MTSS Committee, Wellness Committee, SST Committee, SART/SARB Committee, and Special Services Team.

Borba has also served many positions on the California School Nurses Organization (CSNO) Central Valley Section Board for over 24 years as a board member at large and co-chair of products. Ana was also recognized by CSNO at the state level and awarded the "Excellence in School Nursing" award in 2022. Ana is valued by her administrator and peers for her knowledge and expertise as a Credentialed School Nurse.

Todd Canterbury, Intervention Resource Classroom (IRC), Intervention Resource Teacher, 27 years



Todd Canterbury began his teaching journey as an elementary educator and then transitioned to TCOE's Migrant Education Program. Never one to back away from a challenge, he later began teaching at the local juvenile detention facility "just for fun" — showing his belief that every student deserves a quality education and a teacher who believes in them. In the final 12 years of his career, Canterbury found his calling in special education, serving as an intervention resource teacher.

Canterbury has always emphasized the importance of social-emotional wellness, making his classrooms safe, positive spaces where students felt respected and understood. Students flocked to Canterbury not just because he was an exceptional teacher, but because he believed in them.

The IRC Program congratulates Todd Canterbury on a well-deserved retirement.

"Thank you for your service, your heart, and your dedication to every student who had the privilege to learn from you."

Tony Cavanagh, School Safety Program, School Safety Manager, 35 years



After 35 years of devoted service to education in Tulare County, Tony Cavanagh is leaving behind a remarkable legacy of leadership and community spirit. Cavanagh began his journey with TCOE in 1989, and over the years, he built a legacy with prevention education, Friday Night Live, and the School Safety Program. Whether managing day-to-day operations, supporting school programs, or DJing dozens of school dances across the county to provide a safe alternative for kids during Friday Night Live activities, Cavanagh approached every task with professionalism and heart. But Cavanagh was far more than his job title — some say he was a cornerstone of the TCOE culture, known just as much for his vibrant personality as his dependable work. The Tulare County Office of Education thanks Tony Cavanagh for his years of service and his infectious spirit.

The School Safety Program congratulates Tony Cavanagh on his retirement. “May the next chapter be as full of joy, passion, and rhythm as the one you leave behind.”

Bynovu Cha, Services for Education & Employment, Youth Development Specialist, 32 years



In his 32-year career at TCOE, Nou Cha helped thousands of Tulare County adults and youth live a better life. Using his own personal experience as inspiration, Cha coached numerous cash aid recipients, giving them a glimpse of what life could be like as they followed their career dreams. He also dedicated countless hours mentoring disconnected youth, showing them the possibilities that exist for them if they simply believe in themselves. Beyond serving the community, Cha was a huge source of moral support to his colleagues. When a co-worker was experiencing a family emergency that took him off the job for over a month, Cha jumped in to provide services to all of the co-worker’s active clients. Each time Cha saw a need for change, he showed leadership by making suggestions for positive program growth. In 2023, he was honored with the Innovators by Design Workforce Professional of the Year award. Cha will be remembered as a friend, mentor, and ultimate professional.

Veronica Deanda, Migrant Education Program, Student Recruiter, 23 years



In her 23 years of much-appreciated service with TCOE's Migrant Education Program, Veronica Deanda has made many invaluable contributions to Tulare County. As a student recruiter, Deanda made a real impact by developing relationships with local school districts, businesses, and agricultural workers to connect migrant students with educational resources. Her bubbly and outgoing personality helped her easily connect with all of the district contacts and families that she worked with.

The Migrant Education Program thanks Veronica for her many years of dedicated service to migratory families. "We wish you all the best in your well-deserved retirement and hope it's filled with new adventures, relaxation, and the opportunity to spend time with your beautiful family."

Cindy Dinis, AcCEL Program, Instructional Assistant, 27 years

Cindy Dinis has been an integral part of the Tulare County special education program for the past 27 years as an instructional assistant. She has served students in various classroom settings from elementary to high school in the Visalia area, with the last six years of her career spent at El Diamante High School. With her caring attitude and dedication to students, her impact is clear to those around her.

"Cindy's tireless work has touched many lives and hearts," said Nick Barker, the teacher in Dinis's classroom. "Many of my students' achievements were possible because of Cindy's commitment to teaching them and loving them, always going above and beyond every day."

The AcCEL Program is grateful and blessed to have had her unwavering and dedicated support for nearly three decades. "Please know that your presence will be greatly missed, but we're so happy that you'll have more time to love on your precious grandbabies!"

Teresa Fitton, Mild to Moderate Programs, Instructional Assistant, 17 years

Teresa Fitton has served as an instructional aide in the mild/moderate special education program for many years. She has specifically served the students and families of Springville from 2008 until her retirement this month. Numerous students in both

general and special education have benefited from her support and instruction over the years, and she has become a beloved fixture of Springville School.

At Springville School, Fitton was more than an instructional assistant. She was a resident seamstress, nurse, bus driver, provider of food and clothes, cheerleader, supporter and an awesome person to just talk with. She loved every student like they were her own child. When she arrives at school, children would run to her with their arms open.

The AcCEL Program congratulates Teresa Fitton on her retirement. "You will be missed in so many ways."

Rosa Flores, Early Childhood Education Program, Teacher Assistant, 28 years

After an inspiring 28-year career as a teacher assistant, Rosa Flores is entering retirement. Specializing in toddler care, Flores excelled at serving TCOE's youngest learners in the London Center's toddler classroom. She assisted lead teachers in managing the environment, routine, and curriculum of their classrooms. The children loved her presence in the classroom because of the humor and affection she showed. When toddlers were upset on their first day, Flores always found different ways to comfort them. She helped families feel comfortable as well. As a bilingual speaker, Flores maintained positive and open communication with every parent she worked with. Flores was a team player who worked well with all the staff and families, and she found joy in taking care of the toddlers.

Jodi Fortney, AcCEL Program, Teacher, 38 years

Jodi Fortney started her career as a special education teacher for the county's moderate-to-severe program at Tulare's Clinite Center. After teaching there for many years, she taught at Live Oak Middle School before transferring to the Visalia area and teaching in both elementary and secondary classrooms. Fortney's example has been recognized by students, parents, and educators. In 2009, she was awarded the Community Advisory Committee Brent Rast Award for excellence in teaching, and, in 2017, she received the Chinese Cultural Center High School Educator of the Year Award. Her commitment, love for her students, and her work is beyond inspiring.

The AcCEL Program wishes Jodi Fortney a happy retirement. "Jodi, your presence will be greatly missed, but we'll do our best to continue with your heart in this work. Happy retirement and enjoy riding off into the sunset on that Harley-Davidson."

Luisa Garcia, Early Childhood Education Program, Supervisor, 4 years



Luisa Garcia has been in the educational field for 27 years. In 1998, she became a parent volunteer at Allensworth Child Development Center where her three-year-old son attended. Here, she was given the opportunity to become a substitute — she deems this a blessing because she did not have any education at the time. From 2000 to 2004, Garcia worked as a preschool teacher at Allensworth, and in 2002 obtained her high school diploma and teacher permit. Then, Garcia became a supervisor/teacher at Alpaugh CDC. While serving in this role, she also obtained her AS degree and her site supervisor permit from Bakersfield College. From there, she served as a supervisor at both the Allensworth and Alpaugh centers. Garcia loves the work she does and is thankful for the opportunities she has received.

In reflecting on her time with ECE, Garcia said, “I am very grateful for everything that God has put in my path to bless me. We should never forget where we come from. Humbleness is the key to open a lot of doors.”

Joe Garza, Jr., Services for Education & Employment, Youth Development Specialist, 25 years

From helping adults transition off cash aid to assisting youth in finding their place in the world of work, Joe Garza brought a high level of professionalism to his 25 years of service at TCOE. Following a career with the United States Navy, Garza first joined TCOE as a job developer. In this role, he built a network of partners in the private and public sectors and excelled at developing curriculum for work readiness workshops. Following this experience, Garza served as a community work incentives counselor. Here he successfully connected adults with disabilities to careers. Garza was also active in the community, serving as a board member for Tulare Emergency Aid, a member of the Tulare Inter-Agency Council, and the Citizens Assisting Local Veterans in Need (CALVIN), a Tulare County veterans collaborative.

Angela Griffith, Mild to Moderate Programs, Education Specialist, 19 years

Angela Griffith dedicated nearly two decades to supporting student success across diverse educational settings. Beginning in 2005 as a Neverstreaming teacher, she

provided targeted support to help students reach their full potential. In 2012, she served as a migrant resource coordinator, advocating for and assisting migrant students and their families in accessing essential educational resources. From 2013 to 2024, she worked as a mild/moderate special education teacher, where her commitment to supporting her students made a lasting impact. Known for her compassion and her belief in every student's ability to succeed, Griffith enjoyed helping students grow and thrive throughout their educational journeys. The Special Services division appreciates Griffith's positive contributions to the students and families she has served over the years.

Barbara Grimsley, Special Services, Licensed Vocational Nurse, 2 years



Barbara Grimsley has been a licensed vocational nurse with the AcCEL program for the past two school years, and she is also the proud mother of five children. In 1971, Grimsley began her vocational nursing program at Northeastern Junior College in Sterling, Colorado. She then moved to California in 1985 and worked in a variety of settings before meeting her current husband. Together, she and her husband opened a care facility for the elderly and operated it for 12 years. After that, at age 62, Grimsley obtained her Associate of Science at San Joaquin Valley College. She went on to work for Fowler Unified School District for six years before joining the TCOE AcCEL nursing team, where she has served students of all ages. Grimsley has been a steadfast support to students and will be greatly missed by students and staff.

Barbara Grimsley is looking forward to spending more time with her husband. The AcCEL Program wishes her the best in her retirement.

Beatrice Hernandez, Early Childhood Education Program, Education Specialist, 21 years



Bea Hernandez, wife of David Hernandez and mother to six children, is completing her 21-year-long journey with TCOE. Inspired by her mother who worked in North Visalia's Head Start program, Hernandez started as a family service worker for Head Start and then became an education specialist after receiving her B.A. in Early Childhood Development. Outside of TCOE, Hernandez also worked for the US Census Bureau, Mattel toys, and the Real Alternatives for Youth Organization (RAYO). She has also served as a board member for Colegio de

la Tierra and hosted free quilting classes for the community. One notable project she completed was a 40th anniversary quilt for Head Start, which every center participated in making.

Hernandez's goal in life has always been to make a difference in the lives of others, and as she enters retirement, she looks forward to organizing a quilting circle for moms and continuing to exercise with her husband.

Rita Jahnke, Early Childhood Education Program, Training Specialist, 31 years



Rita Jahnke, a native of Costa Rica who built a life in Visalia after meeting her now-husband, is retiring after 31 years of service to TCOE. She's held six different positions within the organization, with each one building on her passion for early childhood development and family support services.

Jahnke began her journey as a records clerk. Later she became a referral counselor, assisting families in finding quality childcare options that met their needs. She then advanced into the role of a library technician, training specialist, and coach for early learning educators.

In her last position as a training specialist, Jahnke continued to work closely with both families and providers to ensure children had the best possible start in life.

Jahnke's retirement plans are to travel, exercise, and spend time with her husband doing the things they were not able to do before. She also would like to open a consulting business, volunteer, and learn new hobbies.

San Juanita “Nancy” Magana, Early Childhood Education Program, Supervisor, 24 years



Nancy Magana has served Tulare County for the past 24 years as a teacher assistant, teacher, and supervisor. She got her start with the Tulare County Office of Education Early Childhood Education Program as a parent, and after volunteering at the Cutler Child Development Center for about one year, she was hired as a teacher assistant in June 2000. Throughout her career, Magana traveled the valley covering child development centers in Cutler, Woodlake, Earlimart, and Dinuba. As she did, she provided much support to her staff and families, including resources for those who experienced hardship. Nancy was a fast learner who picked up the responsibilities of each new position quickly.

The Early Childhood Education Program wishes Nancy well on her new journey!

Marla Martin, Educational Resource Services, Staff Development & Curriculum Specialist, 15 years



Marla Martin served as an educator in Tulare County for 38 years. She began her career as a classroom teacher in Dinuba Unified, where she developed a passion for language development and English language arts. Martin served her district as a teacher, reading resource specialist, and academic coach. In 2010, she joined the Educational Resource Services team as a staff development and curriculum specialist. In this role, Martin supported ELA/ELD teaching and learning. She served as a coach for the CLSD Readership Grant Network and various other networks of practice. Most recently, she worked alongside Amy Sullivan, TCOE's UTK director, to provide training and support for transitional kindergarten teachers. This support included serving as a Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) program coach in select districts. Martin is most excited that her own children have pursued careers as educators in Tulare and surrounding counties. She counts it a privilege to guide and support them as they serve in their communities.

Ana Martinez, Mild to Moderate Programs, Instructional Assistant, 24 years

With over two decades of dedicated service in special education, Ana Martinez worked as an instructional aide from 2000 to 2024, supporting students with a wide range of

needs. From 2000 to 2021, she worked closely with students with moderate to severe needs, demonstrating compassion, patience, and a commitment to helping each student thrive. In 2021, she transitioned to supporting students with mild to moderate disabilities, continuing to provide individualized support and fostering inclusive learning environments until her retirement in September 2024. Julie Clark, a special education teacher at La Sierra Military Academy during Ana's time there, said, "Ana was such a great addition to the La Sierra team. She consistently brought a positive attitude and had a remarkable ability to connect with students. Her support and enthusiasm made a meaningful difference in our classroom."

The Special Services Division thanks Ana for her positive impact on the lives of students and families of Tulare County!

Maryann "May" McCorkill, AcCEL Program, Instructional Assistant, 9 years

May McCorkill has been an instructional assistant with Tulare County's AcCEL program, serving students with moderate-to-severe disabilities and assisting lead teachers for the past nine years. Her teacher, Nick Barker, saw May's dedication firsthand.

"[May] has brought so much joy and experience to my teaching practice, and there will never be quite an equal replacement to the love and care that she shows our students every day," he said. "May gives endlessly and loves each student unconditionally, something which I'm grateful to have as an example to try to emulate. She has made me a better teacher in so many ways."

The AcCEL Program will miss May's gracious smile and gentle care. "We are excited for this new chapter for you and your family. Thank you for your dedication and support over all these years. We wish you nothing but the best!"

Marlene Moreno, Administration, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, 27 years



Earlier this year, Marlene Moreno retired, having provided the Tulare County Office of Education with 27 years of service at Educational Resource Services, Human Resources, and finally, the Office of the County Superintendent of Schools. As the executive assistant to the county superintendent of schools, Moreno served both Jim Vidak and Tim Hire, helping with the day-to-day operations of the superintendent's office. Among her many duties were the coordination of several large events, including the Tulare County Support Staff Conference, the Excellence in Education Awards, and the Confucius' Birthday/Educator of the Year Awards. She also supported the Tulare County Board of Education, the Tulare County Office of Education Foundation and the Tulare County School Boards Association. Most recently, she created a learning series for administrative assistants serving TCOE programs to meet and discuss better ways to support their programs and each other.

In retirement, Moreno is enjoying traveling, crafting, spending more time with her grandson, and serving as an elder in her tribe.

Alecia Myers, Early Childhood Education Program, Kitchen Supervisor, 25 years

Alecia Myers worked at the Earlimart Child Development Center as a kitchen supervisor and cook for 25 years. In these roles, she was a responsible employee, making sure all children were fed with warm meals every day. When she walked into the classroom, she brought a smile to the children's faces. It was a pleasure working with her, and she made the lives of her team easy. We knew that she had everything under control in the kitchen.

ECEP staff say, "Enjoy your retirement, Alecia, you've earned it!"

Kelley Petty, CHARACTER COUNTS!, Coordinator, 20 years



Kelley Petty is retiring after 36 years in education. From middle school teacher to school administrator to the Tulare County Office of Education's CHARACTER COUNTS! coordinator, Petty enjoyed supporting not only the school staff and students, but their communities as well.

In her 20 years as CHARACTER COUNTS! coordinator, Petty helped to grow the visibility of the program through a partnership with KSEE24 TV known as "Your Character Matters"

– weekly stories of students who exhibit great character. She also oversaw the growth of the Pursuing Victory with Honor (PVWH) program, a sportsmanship component of CHARACTER COUNTS! Under her leadership, PVWH grew to include student recognitions with Kiwanis Clubs in Visalia and Tulare, two large sportsmanship conferences, and a banquet for outstanding student-athletes from each Tulare County high school. She also coordinated scholarship awards through a partnership with the Provident-Salierno Family Foundation.

In retirement, Kelley is going to enjoy spending more time with her grandchildren and taking in lots of sporting events with her husband, Eric.

Graciela Reynoso, Early Childhood Education Program, Home Educator, 10 years



Graciela Reynoso's retirement marks the close of a remarkable chapter. Her ten years of service with the Early Childhood Education Program were defined by hard work and unwavering commitment. As a home educator, Reynoso's weekly home visits not only connected students with educational services, but they also brought positivity and encouragement to the families she served. Reynoso's joy and friendship has made a lasting impact on her clients and coworkers, and it is difficult to say goodbye to such a valued colleague and friend.

The Early Child Education Program wishes her a retirement filled with peace, joy, and the fulfillment of your dreams. "You will always hold a special place in our hearts, and our office has not been the same without you. Wishing you endless happiness and many blessings as you begin this well-deserved new chapter."

Benny Rivera, Services for Education & Employment, Employment & Benefits Specialist, 26 years



Throughout her 26 years at TCOE, Benny Rivera literally served thousands of youth. For several decades, she managed an annual caseload of 50-100 youth, providing them with resume and job search assistance and securing hundreds of work placements. Rivera excelled at communicating with local employers, convincing them to give youth a chance to work and build skills to help themselves and their families. She was a trooper, always being a team player and learning new job responsibilities wherever she was placed. In 2018, Rivera earned her certification as a community work incentives counselor, learning the nuances of the Ticket to Success program. Then, in 2020, Rivera took on a new program serving youth with disabilities. In this capacity, she demonstrated a heart for service, being very patient and kind with each and every client. Rivera is often contacted by former clients to express their appreciation for her help.

Jay Schaak, Maintenance/Operations, Air Conditioning/HVAC Mechanic, 10 years



Jay Schaak came to TCOE in 2015 as a dedicated and highly skilled HVAC technician. Over the past 10 years, he has brought expertise, a detail-oriented approach, and exceptional customer service to every project he undertook. Schaak could quickly diagnose problems and solutions that would minimize downtime, which improved response times to our facilities and overall quality of service. He ensured our facilities remained comfortable and conducive to learning. Over the course of his employment, Schaak built strong relationships with staff and faculty members.

Maintenance/Operation appreciates Jay Schaak for his dedicated service to TCOE staff and students. "We wish you the very best in your future endeavors."

Rhonda Souza, Services for Education & Employment, Employment Benefits Specialist, 34 years

Rhonda Souza was a stellar employee who helped both youth and adults in need throughout her 34 years at TCOE. As a youth counselor in her early years, Souza managed a caseload of young adults ages 16-24, providing them with resume and job search assistance and securing hundreds of work experience placements. Souza next

worked in the More Opportunities for Viable Employment (MOVE) program, where she excelled at securing jobs in other states for Tulare County residents who could not find employment locally. In her last eight years at TCOE, Souza became a certified community work incentives counselor, assisting adults with disabilities to find meaningful employment through the Ticket to Success program. Throughout her time at TCOE, Souza assisted management with grant writing, and she was always willing to assist coworkers whenever needed. In addition, she was an active member of the Training & Employment Committee, serving as an officer on its executive board.

Barbara Sovey-Falat, Special Services - Related Services, Speech & Language Pathologist, 8 years



Barbara Sovey-Falat has been a practicing speech pathologist for over 40 years. Since joining the TCOE team in 2017, she provided therapeutic speech and language instruction for students with a variety of communication disorders. Sovey-Falat has worked with several teams in both the mild/moderate small school setting as well as the AcCEL program. She is a very skilled clinician, and she worked diligently with students to make meaningful progress in their communication skills.

Related Services appreciates Barbara Sovey-Falat's service. "Thank you, Barb!"

Khamphoui Sriphaseuth, Early Childhood Education Program, Teacher Assistant, 23 years



Khamphoui Sriphaseuth began her journey with Tulare County Office of Education with the Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP) as a teacher assistant. She worked at the La Sierra Child Development Center (CDC), beginning in December 2001.

Sriphaseuth then worked at the Farmersville CDC (Hester School) in June of 2004. She also worked at the Senaida Garcia Center with the infants and toddlers and Clinite CDC. She returned to Senaida Garcia Center in 2016.

ECEP wishes Khamphoui Sriphaseuth well on her new journey.

Darlene Tyndal, Services for Education & Employment, Employment Services Coordinator, 4 years



Darlene Tyndal is retiring after a 30+ year career spanning the private, nonprofit, government, and educational sectors. Darlene enjoyed the various positions she served in, including traffic technician, assistant traffic engineer, program manager, and grant writer. After a 10-year run as the grants and program coordinator for the Tulare County District Attorney's Office, Darlene spent the final four and one-half years of her career at the Tulare County Office of Education. Here, she managed several programs to help youth and adults as they transitioned into the workforce, many for the first time.

Joy Voita, Special Services – Parent Liaisons, Parent Liaison, 2 years



Joy Voita has worked as a special education parent liaison for Tulare County Office of Education for a total of two years. In this time, she helped countless parents and school districts resolve disagreements while making sure that students with exceptional needs receive the education they deserve. Voita's passion for helping families runs deep and is born of personal experience — giving her the opportunity to build connections and trust with families. Voita is forever taking care of others. Coworkers will tell you she is one of the most caring people you'll ever meet. She is someone who checks in on others frequently, always makes time for a cup of coffee, and calls just to make sure your day is going well.

Both the families she served and her coworkers will miss Joy's huge heart and wish her the very best!

Judy Williams, Early Childhood Education Program, Supervisor, 30 years



Judy Williams started her 30-year journey with TCOE's Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP) as a parent. With a child enrolled at the Clinite Child Development Center, she began as a volunteer. At the same time, she continued her education, working toward an associate degree. After graduating, Williams was hired as a substitute teacher at Clinite before transitioning to a full-time teacher in 1995. She remained at Clinite for 11 years until she accepted a supervisor position at Pixley Child Development Center. Three years later, Williams returned to the Clinite CDC as supervisor, where she mentored many staff. On top of her roles with ECEP, Williams was also part of many committees over the years including LIFT, CSFFEL (Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning) and a committee to select mentor teachers and directors at College of the Sequoias.

The staff at ECEP wish Judy well on her new journey.

Rohn Wittwer, Court/Community Schools, Teacher, 22 years

Earlier this year, math teacher Rohn Wittwer retired from the Court School after 22 years of service in three TCOE schools. Wittwer instructed students at both Court and Community Schools, as well as at La Sierra Military Academy during his career. He had a service mindset, always striving to provide students with opportunities to improve their lives.

Wittwer used life stories to share his wisdom and provide a resource for students to reflectively consider. His students knew they could count on him for support.

Wittwer also used hands-on lessons, including the construction of a roller coaster out of paper to test what students had learned about angles. With very limited supplies, student teams were competitively engaged, showing how their rollercoaster was the superior one!

In retirement, Rohn is working on a book of stories he compiled about supporting students!

Maria Yanes, AcCEL Program, Instructional Assistant, 18 years

Maria “Maru” Yanes has been an instructional assistant with the AcCEL program for 18 years. She has been very knowledgeable about her students’ physical and intellectual needs, and she was always willing to coach new staff. Many teachers that have worked with her over the years remember the artistic and musical flair that she would bring into student projects. Not only that, Yanes showed up every day with patience and compassion for working with her students.

The AcCEL Program appreciates Maru Yanes’ contribution to the students she served. “Thank you for your dedication to AcCEL students, Maru, and congratulations on your retirement!”

Irene Zavala, Special Services – Related Services, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, 16 years



Irene Zavala served as a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) as part of TCOE’s Related Services team for the past 16 years. Prior to her career as TVI, Zavala was a general education teacher at Sequoia Union Elementary School for several years. In her work, she provided specialized instruction, including Braille, adapted materials, and assistive technologies to support the unique needs of the students on her caseload. Zavala was proactive in her approach when collaborating with district teams throughout the county, and her hard work and dedication have been greatly appreciated over the years. She led with grace and supported both teachers and parents in navigating the world of all things TVI. Zavala is a true team player. She lives out TCOE’s Core Values of on a daily basis.

The Related Services Program appreciates all that Irene provided students with visual impairments. “Thank you, Irene.”

Tulare AcCEL student accepted into Ohio State TOPS Program



Adam Alcaraz is a Buckeye!

Alcaraz, a student in the Tulare AcCEL Program, announced his acceptance to The Ohio State University's TOPS Program with a "Go Buckeyes!" in his final message to family and classmates at the program's graduation ceremony on Tuesday.

According to the TOPS' website, "The TOPS Program is a 2- and 4-year Workforce Development Certificate program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities that focuses on four transition areas: academics, career development, independent living, and self-determination."

"It's extremely exciting," said Anthony Alcaraz, Adam's father. "It's something that we worked really hard to do, and when we'd actually got into it, and he got his acceptance letter, he couldn't hold back. It was exciting for him."



Anthony added that the whole family is relocating to Ohio. They're nervous but excited for the new chapter. at graduation, they were all smiles seeing Adam get his certificate.

"This hit me," Anthony said. "This is a big accomplishment for him. It's awesome."

Tuesday's ceremony at Meitzenheimer Community Center in Tulare was the final AcCEL graduation for TCOE. Sixteen students graduated from the program.

For more on TCOE's AcCEL Program, visit tcoe.org/SpecialEducation/AcCEL.

For more on Ohio State's TOPS Program, visit <https://nisonger.osu.edu/adult/adult-clinics-services/tops>.

Photos above:

~ Adam Alcaraz (top photo) poses for a photo after the Tulare AcCEL graduation ceremony on Tuesday. Adam and his father, Anthony (bottom photo), are excited for Adam's next chapter at The Ohio State University's TOPS Program.

Tulare County Spelling Champion Sarvadnya Kadam is runner-up in Scripps National Spelling Bee



Last week, the Tulare County Spelling Champion, Sarvadnya Kadam of Oak Grove Elementary in Visalia, finished second in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. The runner-up competed for 20 rounds against 243 other spellers from all over the country and several other nations.

Kadam is a three-time Tulare County Spelling Champion who competed in the National Spelling Bee three times. This was his most successful trip to the national bee.

To see Kadam's journey in words at the national bee, visit <https://spellingbee.com/speller-summary/30>.

Photo above:

~ Sarvadnya Kadam, the Tulare County Spelling Champion, spells during the 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee on May 28, 2025, in National Harbor, MD. Photo by Craig Hudson / Scripps National Spelling Bee

Around the County

Redwood's Jazmaine Stewart medals twice at CIF State Track Meet



Jazmaine Stewart's medal count went up by two over the weekend after the Redwood High School (Visalia) junior found herself on the podium twice at the CIF State Track & Field Championships in Clovis.

Stewart placed fifth in girls' long jump with a personal-best leap of 19 feet and 1.50 inches. In the triple jump, she placed sixth with a mark of 38-5.75. The *Visalia Times Delta* reports that Stewart is believed to be Redwood's first state medalist jumper since

1995. She also won the East Yosemite League and Central Section Masters championship titles in both the long jump and triple jump.

Also on the podium for Tulare County, was Redwood sophomore Wyatt Ruby and the boys 4x800 relay team from Monache High School (Porterville). Ruby placed sixth in the boys 110-meter hurdles while the relay team placed seventh. The Monache relay team was made up of Jake Estrada, Alberto Andrade, Conner Machado, and Devin Marino.

Closing out the county's competitors from the final day were Porterville High School senior Heriberto Kian Rangel and Mt. Whitney High School (Visalia) sophomore Arianna Diaz. Rangel placed 10th in boys shot put. Diaz broke the school record once again, placing 18th in the girls 3,200-meter run with a time of 10 minutes, 44.71 seconds.



For more on the event, visit the Visalia Times

Delta at <https://www.visaliatimesdelta.com/story/sports/high-school/2025/06/01/redwoods-jazmaine-stewart-wyatt-ruby-win-cif-track-and-field-medals/83820364007>.

Photos above:

~ Redwood High School's Jazmaine Stewart smiles after receiving a medal for placing fifth in girls long jump at the 2025 CIF State Track & Field Championships, Saturday, June 1, in Clovis. Photo by Vongni Yang / Visalia Times Delta

~ Monache High School's boys 4x800 relay team poses for a picture after receiving medals for their seventh-place finish at the 2025 CIF State Track & Field Championships, Saturday, June 1, in Clovis. Photo by Manny Santoyo

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