

# Tulare County Office of Education

Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools

# news galleryweek

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## Four years strong: Harmony Magnet Academy wins county Academic Decathlon again



This past Saturday, students gathered at the Tulare County Office of Education to compete in the final portion of the Academic Decathlon and learn which school would represent Tulare County in the state competition. Strathmore's Harmony Magnet Academy emerged victorious at this year's competition followed by El Diamante High School taking second. Harmony's team – comprised of Alejandra Rivas, Kris Kashyap, Xitlaly Prado, Claire Holly, Olivia Braghetta, Vincent Martinez, Daniel Jacuinde, Oliver Rodriguez, and Rogelio Nunez, and coached by Kimberly Marsh – brought home the top prize and will be representing Tulare County in this year's state competition in March.

Marsh expressed immense pride in the team's success and perseverance stating, "I'm so proud of all the students. They all worked really hard together as a group." Even as this is the school's fourth consecutive year winning the county competition, she reminded them, "You have to earn it every year."

Harmony demonstrated exceptional skill and collaboration throughout the event. The team's performance in the essay category was particularly remarkable with Braghetta, Jacuinde, and Kashyap all tying for the top score. The team also took the top scores in art, literature, music, science, and social science. Overall, the team scored 36,687.9 points to win. In the Super Quiz competition, Harmony won with 3,640 points.

Kashyap, a junior, had a standout performance, walking away with 11 medals and six plaques. "No words can describe this," he said. "I wasn't expecting this at all." Having joined Academic Decathlon as a freshman, Kashyap now plays a crucial leadership role on the team. Coach Marsh highlighted his impact, noting, "This year we had a lot of talent across the board, but our strongest student is Kris Kashyap."

Academic Decathlon is a comprehensive and challenging competition that evaluates students across a broad range of subject areas, including science, literature, mathematics, economics, and social science. Each season is structured around a central theme, with this year's focus being the Roaring '20s, requiring students to study the historical, cultural, and social impact of the era. In addition to multiple subject exams, participants must deliver prepared speeches, take part in formal interviews with judges, and complete a timed essay.

Teams are made up of students from varying grade point levels, allowing each member to contribute their individual strengths while working toward a shared goal. The competition emphasizes not only academic knowledge but also communication skills, time management, and collaboration.

For more information on participating in Academic Decathlon or Academic Pentathlon (for middle school students) next year, visit <https://tcoe.org/academicdecathlon>.

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## **Students win top prizes in annual Poetry Live! competition**

On February 6, students competed in the Poetry Live! event, performing classic and original poems in multiple categories, including Poetry Out Loud and Poet's Own Voice. The event highlighted student performance skills and literary interpretation, drawing competitors from several county schools. The students at Poetry Live had won at their school level to advance to the county competition held at the Arts Consortium's gallery in downtown Visalia.



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"The other competitors just did so amazing. I was at the edge of my seat, just watching them," said Jayda Freitas. "To feel like I was on their same level of performance was amazing."

Competing in the Poetry Our Loud high school portion of the event, Freitas, a senior at Tulare Union High School, took home first place. She recited "Militants to Certain Other Women" by Katherine Rolston Fisher and "To a Young Dancing Girl" by Elsa Gidlow.

Freitas said preparing for the competition took several nights of rehearsal and support from friends. She practiced by recording herself and reciting her poems multiple times.

The experience, she said, encouraged her to continue pursuing poetry and performance.

"Seeing experienced and non-experienced poets perform was really eye opening," Freitas said. "It taught me that I would love to do it again."

Freitas encouraged students not to shy away from the arts, even if they doubt its practicality.

“Always write, always perform, and keep doing poetry,” she said. Freitas will represent Tulare County at the state Poetry Out Loud competition March 8-9 in Sacramento.

For the first time in the event’s history, two middle school students competed in the Poetry Out Loud Junior competition. Carla Interiano of Pixley Middle School took first place for her recitation of “Ballad of Salthill” by Lindsay Turner and “Failure to Exist” by Elisa Gabbert.

The event also recognized original student poetry during the Poet’s Own Voice competition. Grace Wiseman, 16, a junior at Laurel Springs Academy, won for her original poem, which reflected on a personal experience from her eighth-grade year. The poem was called “Greedy Clock Monster.”

Wiseman said she felt honored to win and appreciated hearing other students share their own writing throughout the event.

“It was just so incredible to hear all this original artwork,” Wiseman said. “Poetry Out Loud is amazing, but hearing everyone’s own writing is even better because it’s theirs.”

Wiseman described her writing process as gradual, explaining that ideas come to her in pieces before she revisits and revises them later.

“Something will kind of come to me, and then I’ll write it down,” Wiseman said. “Then I let it sit and go back to it.”

Through both performance and original writing, the Poetry Live! event allowed students to share personal experiences and creative expressions in front of a supportive audience.

The event showcased the power of poetry as a platform for student voices, encouraging participants to continue exploring literature, performance, and storytelling.

For her win, Wiseman was crowned Tulare County Youth Poet Laureate. Over the course of the next year, she will perform at several community events to elevate the importance of poetry in Tulare County. Wiseman is now eligible to compete in a regional Poetry Out Loud event.

As part of the Poet’s Own Voice event, students had the opportunity to write their own works but not recite them. This portion of the event is called the Poet’s Own Voice Showcase. In this competition, Sydney Frank of Tulare Union High School took first place.

Poetry Out Loud was introduced to Tulare County schools in 2016. Poet’s Own Voice was offered to as a student event during the 2022-23 school year. Together, the two programs make up Poetry Live. Middle and high school students have the opportunity to recite the work of other poets or write and/or perform their own.

For more information about the poetry writing and performance opportunities, visit [tcoe.org/PoetryLive](http://tcoe.org/PoetryLive).

Photos above

~ (l-r) Jayda Freitas, winner of the Poetry Out Loud competition, and Grace Wiseman, winner of the Poet's Own Voice competition, pose for a photo following the Poetry Live event last Friday.

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## Redwood High School repeats as Tulare County Mock Trial champions



The three-peat dream is now a reality for Redwood High School's Mock Trial team! Redwood accomplished its team goal of winning their third straight championship with a victory over University Preparatory High School (Visalia) in the Tulare County Mock Trial finals on February 5.

"It feels great," said Tina Moran, an RHS coach. "We have a team full of seniors that have been with me since three years ago and they've stuck it out. We were just like 'three-peat' all season long. Three-peat, three-peat, three-peat."

Redwood (Visalia) will represent Tulare County at the California Mock Trial finals on March 20-22 in Oakland. McKenzie Chavez, who was selected as MVP by University Prep, said she was excited to share this last state run with her team.

“It's been super fun,” the senior said. “We all are like a big family. We all help each other. We all give each other feedback. We all collaborate with each other. It's been an amazing experience.”

Redwood's winning team is comprised of: Lizeth Alvarado Valdovinos, Janna Asunto, Gurmun Bains, Elizabeth Bellflower, Alina Cervantes-Lopez, Camila Chavez, McKenzie Chavez, Candace Coombs, Haley Davidson, Thai William Dinh, Cebria Freeborn, Amelia Fultz, Wen He, Lelani June Hernandez, Jacky Illian-Zavalsa, Dena Khamdaeng, Yong Lee, Brooke Morgan, Madison Olsen, Susana Isabel Perez, Kelly Pham, Michael Rodriguez, Haleigh Sasin, Evan Silva, Elsa Wendt, and Isabelle Wu.

Redwood was coached by Paul Freeborn, Jennifer McFadden, and Tina Moran, with assistance from attorney coaches Andre Gaston, Josh Fox, Peter Park, and Sophia Park.

Also announced as winners following the Mock Trial finals were the winners of the courtroom artists competition and the courtroom journalist competition.

In the courtroom artists competition, the winning artists advancing to the state competition are Wen He and Isabelle Wu of Redwood High School.



The winning courtroom journalists advancing to the state competition are Diane DiRamos and Lily Ruiz of El Diamante High School.

For the complete list of winners and their winning works, visit <https://tcoe.org/MockTrial/results>.

Photos above:

~ Redwood High School poses for pictures after winning the Tulare County Mock Trial competition on Thursday, February 5.

~ Winning courtroom artist pieces by Wen He (left) and Isabelle Wu (right) of Redwood High School (Visalia).

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