

Tulare County
Office of Education

Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools

news
galleryweek

May 6, 2026

Slick Rock Student Film Festival scheduled for Friday, May 8



The annual Slick Rock Student Film Festival takes over the Visalia Fox Theatre in downtown Visalia on Friday, May 8. Free and open to the public, the festival begins with the Premiere Cut screenings at 9:00 a.m. – showing 174 of the 483 films entered in the festival, back to back. The Premiere Cut screenings conclude at 3:00 p.m.

The 483 total films represent the work of over 1,000 students from 50 different high schools and middle schools in Tulare, Kings, Fresno, Kern, and Madera counties. Of the 483 films, 407 were submitted in the high school category, 76 in the middle school category.

Students will begin arriving by limousine to the theater around 5:00 p.m., walking the red carpet to pose for pictures before entering the theater. Doors will open to the public once all students are inside and the program begins at 6:00 p.m.

This year, 16 category awards will be given plus a best overall award for one high school film and one middle school film. The film categories range from animation and nutrition/physical activity PSAs (public service announcements) to documentaries and news broadcasts.

For more information on the festival, visit <https://tcoe.org/SlickRock>

Photo above:

~ Happy Trails is one of 174 films being screened during the Premiere Cut portion of the Slick Rock Student Film Festival on Friday. The film was produced by Brody Terry, Carmel Hall, Titus Silapachai, Savannah LaRue, and Eric Ortiz of Redwood High School. It tells the story of the Happy Trails Riding Academy in Visalia, which is an equine-assisted program for children and adults with physical, cognitive, or emotional disabilities.

Five Tulare County projects earn runner-up and finalist marks at state National History Day

Forty-five projects represented Tulare County at the National History Day state competition this past weekend. Of those 45, five advanced as finalists and one finished as runner-up in their respective divisions.

Those projects were:

- Runner-up in Individual Poster – Elementary: Sebastian Sanchez, Jefferson GATE, Dinuba
- Finalist in Individual Exhibit - Junior: Hector Valadez, Kings River Union Elementary School, Kingsburg
- Finalist in Individual Exhibit - Junior: Victoria Castellanos, Kings River Union Elementary School, Kingsburg
- Finalist in Individual Podcast - Senior: Brent Schiebelhut, Redwood High School, Visalia
- Finalist in Individual Website - Senior: Juan Montelongo, Dinuba High School, Dinuba



“There were more than 1,600 students and 900 projects at the state competition this year, which is more than ever,” said Paula Terrill, of TCOE’s Student Future Ready Events. “Being named a runner-up or finalist in their categories is impressive and takes dedication and a strong work ethic. We are so proud of these students and everything they have accomplished.”

Annual Lip Sync Battle rocks Visalia Fox Theatre



On Friday, Monson-Sultana Joint Union School swept the annual Lip Sync Battle, winning both the Lip Sync and Dance categories.

Drawing from the event’s rock and roll theme, students from Monson-Sultana’s FUEL After School program chose to use music from two rock superstars – Elton John and Lady Gaga.

Monson-Sultana’s streak began in the Lip Sync category with their medley of two Elton John songs. Eighth-grader Zackary Rico portrayed the piano-playing showman, banging out *Crocodile Rock* and *I’m Still Standing*, complete with a costume change and a dance performance. Rico has been the lead for Monson-Sultana’s Lip Sync act for the past four years, previously playing rockers Freddy Mercury, Prince, and Axel Rose.

In the Dance category, Monson-Sultana continued to impress the audience and the judges with a routine to a medley of Lady Gaga songs, entitled *The Mayhem Ball*.



Second place in the Lip Sync category went to the team from Oak Valley Union School in Tulare, with Kings River Union School taking third. In the Dance category, El Monte Middle School in Oroquieta won second. In third was the team from Kings River.

For over 30 years, the Lip Sync Battle has been hosted by the CHOICES Programs as a way for middle school students to build their confidence, and as a reminder to participants and the audience of the importance of leading healthy lives free from drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. The Lip Sync Battle is supported by the state's Tobacco-Use Prevention Education (TUPE) program and Friday Night Live.

Between the two competition categories, emcee Ryan Ginsberg showed the winning videos from the Project Soapbox competition. As part of the CHOICES' Anti-Tobacco/Marijuana Challenge Bowl held in March, student teams created public service announcements about the dangers of vaping. The winners were Pixley Middle School (6th grade), Kings River Union School (7th grade), and Woodville Union School (6th grade).

Around the County

Central Section awards scholar-athletes, Tulare Western's Lauren Starr is top girl scholar-athlete



On Monday, the CIF Central Section hosted its annual Scholar-Athlete Awards Night at The Gardens in Tulare. The evening celebrated over 40 scholar-athletes from the Class of 2026 for their remarkable achievements and hard work both on and off the field of play.

The scholar-athletes all have a 3.5 GPA or higher and were chosen by their respective league administrators to receive a \$500 award. Of all the athletes, two were selected as top scholar-athletes and awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

Tulare County had a total of eight scholar-athletes with Lauren Starr of Tulare Western High School being selected as the Central Section's top girl scholar-athlete. Out of the West Yosemite League (WYL), Starr boasts a 4.28 GPA and is a three-sport athlete. She competed in water polo, soccer, and swimming.

In water polo, which Starr plans to play in college, she is a WYL MVP and four-time league champion. She is also a USA Water Polo Academic All-American, Olympic Development Program National Champion, and four-time Junior Olympic



finalist. She won multiple league championships in soccer and swimming, as well as a Division II championship in swimming.

Tulare County's eight scholar-athletes were:

East Sequoia League

[Aiden Duran](#), Lindsay High School
[David Servin-Chavez](#), Lindsay High School
[Mollie Gillis](#), Strathmore High School
[Anna Villavicencio](#), Woodlake High School

East Yosemite League

[Danelle Benitez](#), El Diamante High School
[Emiliano Sanchez Padilla](#), Golden West High School

West Yosemite League

[Brayden Stevenson](#), Tulare Union High School
[Lauren Starr](#), Tulare Western High School (Top Scholar-Athlete)

Photos above:

~ Over 40 students (top) were recognized at the CIF Central Section Scholar-Athlete Awards Night at The Gardens in Tulare. Lauren Starr (bottom) was selected as the girls' top scholar-athlete and received a \$1,000 scholarship.

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