

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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For Immediate Release

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Tulare County Office of Education Announces:

Theatre Company's Summer Production, "West Side Story," at L.J. Williams Theater; Special Youth Forum Also Scheduled July 23, 24, 29, 30, 31 at 7:30 p.m.; July 24, matinee at 2:00 p.m.

Tulare County Office of Education's Theatre Company is proud to present six public performances of the classic American musical *West Side Story* at the L.J. Williams Theater on the Redwood High School campus in Visalia. *West Side Story* features many well-known songs by Stephen Sondheim and Leonard Bernstein. The musical was also made into a movie in 1961, which received the "Best Picture" Oscar and an amazing nine other Oscar awards.

West Side Story, which is modeled after William Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet, centers on the lives of Tony and Maria — two young people in love despite the opposition of family and friends belonging to rival, warring gangs. Like Romeo and Juliet, tragedy follows Tony and Maria to the end of the musical.

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Performances will begin at 7:30 p.m. on July 23, 24, 29, 30 and 31. An additional matinee performance will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 24. Tickets cost \$5 and are available in advance by contacting Tulare County Office of Education at 733-6300 or 651-1482. Tickets may also be purchased at the door.

Special Youth Forum: “ACT II: Realizing and Achieving Your Hopes and Dreams”

In conjunction with *West Side Story*, the Tulare County Office of Education will hold a special youth forum Wednesday, July 28 beginning at 6:00 p.m. only. The forum is called **Act II: Realizing and Achieving Your Hopes and Dreams**. This event will begin with a live theatrical performance of *West Side Story*. Following a brief intermission, **Act II** will begin at approximately 8:00 p.m. Although the presentation will reflect on the loss of life and love seen in the musical production, it will offer hope-filled messages from speakers who have turned from gangs to find personal success in education and business. Admission to this performance of *West Side Story* and **Act II** is free.

Act II was the vision of Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. Using *West Side Story* as a catalyst to discuss growing gang involvement in Tulare County, a team of educators, youth development specialists and law enforcement officers came together to create the forum. The event’s development team is committed to working together to provide Tulare County students with the assistance they need to live healthy, productive adult lives.

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"We couldn't perform *West Side Story* without addressing the consequences of violence," says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. "It would be too easy to make this production a celebration of our talented young people and the wonderful songs. The problem of gang violence in Tulare County is a real one. And it's going to take awareness, vision and cooperation to solve it," concludes Mr. Vidak.

One of the featured speakers at **Act II** is Frank Puchi, a professor of Chicano Studies at Palomar College in San Diego County. Over the course of 15 years, Professor Puchi has recruited almost 1900 gang members to attend college and enter his program. Of those, 359 have become teachers; 82 percent of his students complete the program. Of those who complete Professor Puchi's program, 84 percent transfer to a state university.

For information about the Tulare County Office of Education, please call the Public Information Office at (559) 733-6606 or visit our website at www.tcoe.org. For additional information about Theatre Company and the summer musical production, *West Side Story*, please call 651-1482.

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