

Tulare County  
Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

news  
galleryweek

October 12, 2022

---

**CHARACTER COUNTS! Week kicks off Monday**



**CHARACTERCOUNTS!® WEEK**



**Fun and Easy Ways to Celebrate**

October 16 - 22, 2022

Next week is CHARACTER COUNTS! Week. Kelley Petty, Tulare County CHARACTER COUNTS! coordinator reports that over 4,700 students from a record-breaking 154 schools will be honored next week. Teachers, parents, and other community members nominated the students to be recognized in the program's 27th annual celebration.

The CHARACTER COUNTS! Program reviewed the nominations and selected a winner and two finalists for each of the Pillars of Character to be profiled in the *Visalia Times-Delta/Tulare Advance-Register* next week. A story about the students who best represent the Pillars of Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship will appear in the newspaper each day next week.

These top honorees and finalists will also be celebrated at the annual Provident/Salierno Family Foundation Awards ceremony on November 2.

"We hope schools will join us in celebrating Tulare County's long-standing commitment to character education," Petty said. "The national office has put together a number of

great ideas schools can use to commemorate CHARACTER COUNTS! Week on campus, in the community, and on social media.”

For ideas on how to celebrate CHARACTER COUNTS! Week, visit <https://charactercounts.org/character-counts-week>.

---

## Bright Start returns to pumpkin patches



Hundreds of Bright Start Parent Infant Program (Bright Start) families are getting an opportunity to enjoy the fall season together with the annual pumpkin patch visits in Visalia and Porterville.

“We come every year and our numbers have just gotten bigger and bigger. And as you can see, people are ready to come out and gather again,” said Stephanie Caldera, a parent/school liaison.

The Bright Start Program provides early intervention services to over 1,100 Tulare County families who have children with special needs between the ages of birth to three, as well as children who have hearing, speech, vision, or orthopedic delays.

On their morning visits to Vossler Farms Corn Maze and Pumpkin Patch in Visalia and Changala's Pumpkin Patch in Porterville, Bright Start families are able to socialize and find support through an expanded community. Children also have the chance to work on interacting with others after previously isolating during COVID.



“Socialization is huge,” Caldera said. “This really is a social gathering for our families so they can meet other families in early intervention and not feel that isolation. And then, just for the kids to be around each other. With COVID, we were social distancing and in isolation. For some of our kids, this is a completely new experience.



“It’s for families to be able to come to a community event where other families aren’t judging them,” Caldera added. “Where everybody has a child who, if they go into a tantrum, we get it.”

Events like the pumpkin patch give families and Bright Start staff a chance to see, work on, and celebrate developmental milestones such as gross motor skills, turn taking, and waiting in line.

“It’s amazing because it’s the growth that the families want to see,” said Khou Xiong, an early intervention assistant. “We’re out there doing what we can to support the families and their children.”

After 15 years of hosting families at pumpkin patches, Caldera said she loves seeing families enjoy new experiences in a doubly beneficial event.



“Just to see a family out here with their child and enjoying the pumpkin patch, that’s what it’s all about,” Caldera said. “And to still be able to work on those skills. You’re killing two birds with one stone. It’s worth the preparation and the work to get it done. We love it.”



For more information on Bright Start, contact Ron Pekarek, administrator, at [ronp@tcoe.org](mailto:ronp@tcoe.org).

Photos above:

~ Families in Bright Start Parent Infant Program spent a morning at Changala's Pumpkin Patch in Porterville. Pumpkin patch visits are held for Bright Start families in Porterville and Visalia.

---

## Special Services introduces two new occupational therapy programs to support students' development

This year, Special Services implemented two new programs to assist young children with their occupational development. These programs aid with the development of hand coordination, fine motor skills and finger dexterity, and more – skills that lead to handwriting.

The first new program incorporates Shoebox Task Boxes in many special education classrooms throughout the county. The task boxes are utilized

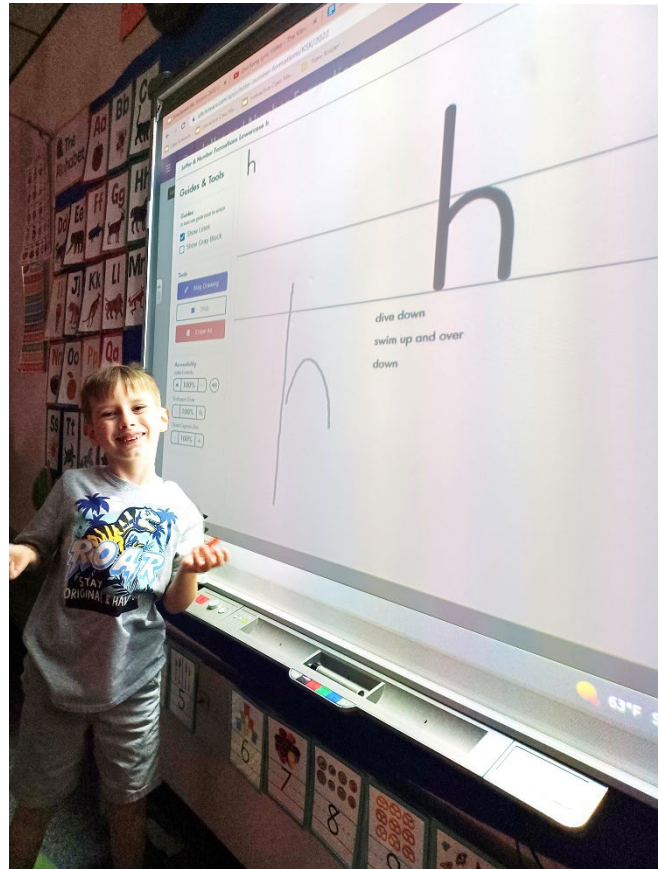




with a curriculum developed by the TEACCH Center (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication-related Children), which is affiliated with the University of North Carolina.

The TEACCH task boxes help children develop in various areas: finger dexterity and hand coordination, one-to-one correspondence, pull-apart and put-in tasks, stacking and sorting, fine motor, pre-academic, pre-vocational, and sensory-related skills.

The TEACCH task boxes allow teachers and students to work one-on-one, with time for the teacher to instruct, observe, and assess the child's response during various situations. While working on the given task with the student, teachers are able to focus on supporting the development of communication, academic, sensory, and social skills. The task boxes are beneficial because they allow students to work independently in a structured environment while feeling encouraged and motivated to complete each task.



In addition to the TEACCH task boxes, Special Services also purchased material from Handwriting Without Tears for several classrooms. Through the curriculum, teachers are able to work with students on the fine motor skills that lead to writing. Much like the TEACCH framework, Handwriting Without Tears provides activities to engage children in various forms of learning.

Both programs are essential resources to supporting the development of children's vital skills and independence. For more information on available occupational therapy services, contact Rachel Weaver, administrator for Related Services, at [rachelw@tcoe.org](mailto:rachelw@tcoe.org).

Photos above:

~ Top A student at Maple Elementary in Tulare works with a task box that is part of the new TEACCH curriculum.

~Below, another student demonstrates his success at the whiteboard in a Handwriting Without Tears lesson. Both programs are new to Special Services this year, aiding students with their occupational development.

---

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

Contributors: Nayirah Dosu, Marlene Moreno, Jennifer Fisher, Kelley Petty, Kathleen Green-Martins, Stephanie Caldera, Ron Pekarek, and Socorro Arias.

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.