

Graduation season begins this week, Gonzales, Reddy chosen as “Honored Scholars”



Dozens of students from Special Services programs, University Preparatory High School (UPHS), La Sierra Charter School, and Court/Community Schools are preparing to graduate beginning this week. A complete list of the upcoming ceremonies is included below. Readers are invited to visit TCOE's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds to see posts following the ceremonies.

To honor graduates throughout the valley, each year ABC30 runs a feature entitled “Honored Scholars.” Schools are invited to submit the names of a top male and top female from their senior classes. The students chosen by UPHS are Charvi Reddy and Jay Gonzales.

“Charvi and Jay embody the attributes of the UPHS Crest - academics, leadership, and service,” said Helen Millorn-Feller, UPHS lead teacher. “These two model each of these traits for all the younger students at UPHS.”

Reddy will graduate Thursday as one of the UPHS valedictorians and be one of the student speakers at the ceremony. In her four years at UPHS, she has led the school’s robotics team and ran the school’s Science Olympiad and Mock Trial academic teams. Reddy has also completed nearly 100 college units at College of the Sequoias.

Additionally, Reddy works as an intern for the Tulare County District Attorney. Classmates will remember her as the senior who mentored younger “pandas,” assisted in the music classes, and helped run most of the major clubs and academic teams at UPHS. “I have appreciated that UPHS is a small school and that it gave me the opportunity to decide what I wanted to do and how I could serve,” she said.

In the fall, Reddy will enter UCLA where she plans to study human biology and society, with plans to become a public health attorney.

Jay Gonzales is one of UPHS’s salutatorians. He will also be one of the featured student speakers at the ceremony. Gonzales entered UPHS as a freshman, having been a home school student. “Being in a social environment with my fellow students helped me to grow,” he said. “They are my inspiration to become a cinematographer.”

Gonzales’ passion for filmmaking will carry him to Biola University in the fall. At UPHS, he has a reputation for telling students’ stories through the lens of his camera, leading the yearbook video team, and creating short PSAs throughout the year. He also created the UPHS “Senior Video” designed to capture the story of the Class of 2022. A copy of the video can be found on YouTube at [youtube.com/watch?v=LALT-4i5Q9E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LALT-4i5Q9E).

Gonzales has also been a member of UPHS’s Science Olympiad team, a Panda Buddy mentor, a High School Big mentor, and a mathematics tutor, helping in Algebra I classes.

UPHS will graduate 48 seniors this year. Six of them have simultaneously obtained their associate’s degree from College of the Sequoias. Those seniors are Mia Giannandrea, Sarat’ika Kelly, Alaina Romero, Leo Romero, Holden Milliorn-Feller, and Aiden Alonzo. All seniors will be attending college in the fall with one enlisting in military service.

2022 Tulare County Office of Education and Charter School Graduation and Promotion Ceremonies

Wednesday, May 25, 2022 @ 3:00 p.m.

Valley Life Charter School

Promotion/Graduation Ceremony
3737 S. Akers, Visalia

Thursday, May 26, 2022 @ 10:00 a.m.

Porterville Area AcCEL Programs

Porterville College Gymnasium
100 E. College Ave., Porterville

Thursday, May 26, 2022 @ 6:00 p.m.

University Preparatory High School

Visalia Fox Theatre
308 W. Main St., Visalia

Thursday, May 26, 2022 @ 7:00 p.m.

Eleanor Roosevelt Community Learning Center

High School Graduation
31191 Road 180, Visalia

Friday, May 27, 2022 @ 10:00 a.m.

Visalia and North County AcCEL Programs

TCOE's Redwood Conference Center
6200 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia

Wednesday, June 1, 2022 @ 8:30 a.m.

Sycamore Valley Academy

Eighth-Grade Promotion Ceremony
6832 Avenue 280, Visalia

Thursday, June 2, 2022 @ 9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

La Sierra Military Academy Graduation

Jr. High School Graduation at 9:00 a.m.
High School and Independent Study Graduation at 7:00 p.m.
1735 E. Houston, Visalia

Monday, June 6, 2022 @ 3:30 p.m.

Court/Community School Graduation

TCOE's Redwood Conference Center
6200 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia

Tuesday, June 7, 2022 @ 10:00 a.m.

Tulare AcCEL Program Area

City of Tulare Parks and Recreation Building
830 S. Blackstone St., Tulare

Photo above:

~ (l-r) Jay Gonzales and Charvi Reddy are two of the 48 seniors graduating from University Preparatory High School this week. The pair will also be featured on ABC30's Honored Scholars program.

Sanchez Jr. announced as College Night Scholarship Award recipient

The College Night Scholarship Committee is honored to congratulate David Sanchez Jr., a senior at Tulare Western High School, for being selected as the 2022 College Night Scholarship Award recipient.

Sanchez Jr. is being awarded with a \$1,000 scholarship renewable for up to four years — totaling \$4,000 — while he is in college. He is the 17th recipient of the College Night Scholarship Award.



Sanchez Jr. will be attending the University of California, Berkeley and will be majoring in psychology. He aspires to work in the field of sports medicine and use psychology to understand and support athletes in the Central Valley. Sanchez Jr. has an affection for the people in his community which was evident in his application and interview. Connections and relationships are very important to him and have provided him many great opportunities.

Sanchez Jr. credits College Night for providing different perspectives. He was able to explore university and college options he had never heard of before, and that helped him gain confidence as he prepared his admissions applications.

Sanchez Jr. is an outstanding scholar with many distinctions awarded for not only academics, but service, involvement in the arts, cross country, and involvement in various clubs and organizations including Danza de la Virgen, CSF, Migrant Speech and Debate, ASB, Police Explorers and various community events in the city of Pixley.

In Sanchez Jr.'s interview, he shared about learning from failure and disappointment. Sanchez Jr. has faced a few challenges and obstacles in his life, but through perseverance and positivity, he has overcome and excelled. He wants to set an example to others in his community and share his story with other students. Sanchez Jr. closed his interview by sharing that he doesn't want to be known for something, but rather be known for DOING something.

students.”

Simmons wins Brent Rast Award, mentors new teachers



As a mentor teacher for Special Services, Cheryl Simmons says that she loves meeting new teachers. “They may be nervous, but I help them realize all the support that they’re going to get,” she said.

As one of two Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA) with Special Services, Simmons mentors new teachers in the AcCEL Program along with coworker Robert McCool. The pair organize a orientation each year to train teachers on a variety of topics, including procedures, curriculum, and lesson plans. Simmons and McCool also visit their mentees’ classrooms on a regular basis.

“Cheryl is a sounding board, a support system, and an instructional inspiration to her mentees,” said Jill Santivanez, Special Services administrator. “She takes on the role of collaborator, lesson developer, confidence builder, and empathetic listener as a coach to new AcCEL teachers. Cheryl is the person in the background making sure everyone’s bucket is filled and no one – staff or student – is going at it alone.”

The TOSA program is relatively new – formed in 2019 as a support to AcCEL teachers. In the fall of this year, Simmons and McCool will be joined by a third TOSA, Erin Elliott.



Earlier this month, Simmons was honored with the Brent Rast Award – a special award given to a teacher of students with profound needs. The award was presented at the annual Community Advisory Committee luncheon.

Simmons began her career in special education in 2006 in Kings County. In 2008, she became the teacher for one of two Community Based Instruction Classrooms (CBIC) in Tulare, working with young adults (ages 18-22) to build their self-care and work skills in order to obtain as much independence as possible. In the fall of 2019, she became a mentor TOSA.

On her role as a mentor she said, “I miss my CBIC students, but I’m enjoying seeing students from kindergarten to age 22. It’s rewarding to see the progress behind their development and to know there are many teachers responsible for that. I feel like I’ve landed where I’m supposed to be.”

Photos above:

~ Cheryl Simmons works with fellow mentor teacher Robert McCool on the 2022 AcCEL New Teacher Orientation. Simmons was recently honored with the Brent Rast Award for exemplary service to students with profound needs.

~ Simmons visits the class of her mentee, second-year AcCEL teacher Cindy Domingue, who serves children at Veva Blunt Elementary in Visalia.

Winners announced in second annual Anti-Tobacco Calendar Art Contest



The most important thing Isabel Aguilar remembered from her Tobacco-Use Prevention Education (TUPE) classes, was that nicotine is addictive and there are many health risks. It was something that stuck with Aguilar and can be seen in her award-winning artwork.

Last Thursday, Aguilar was announced as the winner of the second annual Anti-Tobacco Calendar Art Contest. The freshman, who attends Harmony Magnet Academy in Strathmore, will have her work featured on the cover of the 2022-2023 Anti-Tobacco Calendar and inside for the month of March.

“Her artwork truly spoke a thousand words,” said Alice Flores, a CHOICES Program specialist. Aguilar’s artwork focuses on the health effects of vaping and reads, “The HIGH isn’t worth the LOW.” Her art shows a mirrored image of a kid vaping and

hospitalized due to the vaping. To create the image, Aguilar used a graphite pencil, a Sharpie pen, PRISMACOLOR colored pencils, and acrylic markers.



“When I was thinking about it, I was thinking about the positives and negatives of smoking or vaping,” Aguilar said. “That’s why (on my art) you can’t really tell if it’s a vape or smoke. There really are no positives. It shows a kid who’s just on his bed, chilling. But there’s more negative than positive because you can end up intubated in the hospital with severe lung damage.”

Flores added, “There is this misconception in our youth that the use of e-cigarettes may appear to be cool and have no health risk. Yet, the reality is that e-cigarettes pose many health effects.”

Along with Aguilar’s art, 11 other student artists from Porterville Unified School District (PUSD) made up the art for the calendar, which had four themes for artists to choose from: health effects, flavors, environmental effects, and creativity. All 12 were awarded with four all-access passes to McDermont X in Lindsay, while Aguilar also received \$100 worth of restaurant gift cards.

The 2022-2023 Anti-Tobacco Calendar winners were:

Cover Art: Isabel Aguilar, Harmony Magnet Academy
August: Adyson Hensley, Harmony Magnet Academy
September: Izaiah Martinez, Westfield Elementary School
October: Kaylah Gamez, Westfield Elementary School
November: Miroslava Martin, Porterville Military Academy
December: Isabel Aguilar, Harmony Magnet Academy
January: Samantha Arellano, Monte Vista Elementary School
February: Eduardo Lopez Orozco, Monte Vista Elementary School
March: Gwenith Murray, Strathmore High School
April: Isabelle McCusker, Sequoia Middle School
May: Arely Gutierrez, Monache High School
June: Fatima Torres Ramos, Harmony Magnet Academy
July: Bailey Roper, Porterville Military Academy

Porterville Unified receives services from TCOE's CHOICES program along with the TUPE Health Disparities grant program. The focus of the grant is to bring awareness about the dangers of tobacco use. The grant offers youth projects to voice their opinions and empower others to make healthy choices.



This year, CHOICES expanded the calendar contest to PUSD students in grades 3-12 and received nearly 300 entries. Like Aguilar, some of the students from Harmony Magnet Academy, Strathmore High School, and Sequoia Middle School had previously attended CHOICES TUPE classes.

"The CHOICES program would like to thank all of the PUSD participants for making this art competition one of the best," Flores said. "It is so amazing to see our youth use their artwork to influence others to make healthy choices. Thank you so much again to our top 12 winners, you are truly making milestone changes for others to follow."

For more information about the calendar, contact Alice Flores at alicef@tcoe.org.

Photos above:

~ Harmony Magnet Academy students Adyson Hensley, left, and Isabel Aguilar, right, hold up their artwork that will be featured in the 2022-2023 Anti-Tobacco Calendar.

~ Isabel Aguilar's artwork featured a mirrored image of the highs and lows of vaping.

~ Strathmore High School's Gwenith Murray will also have her art featured in the 2022-2023 Anti-Tobacco Calendar.

Tulare student-athletes recognized for Pursuing Victory with Honor

In partnership with the Kiwanis Club of Greater Tulare, TCOE's CHARACTER COUNTS! Program recognized this spring's Pursuing Victory with Honor (PVWH) student-athletes at a breakfast on Tuesday. The Kiwanis Club of Greater Tulare recognizes student-athletes, nominated by their coaches, each season for their sportsmanship. The awards included a certificate, a PVWH pin, and a lawn sign that read "An Athlete of Character Lives Here."



Below is a list of the Pursuing Victory with Honor award winners along with a quote from their coaches.

Tulare Western High School

Kaylie Seechan – girls track: Kaylie was a tremendous help for my first year as a head coach. She helped guide the younger throwers when our throwing coach was out on paternity leave.

Andrew Maciel – boys track: Andrew is our team captain and has the important role of starting off the 4x100-meter relay. He is quick to do anything asked of him and is respected by all his teammates.

Tulare Union High School

Cecilia Arredondo – softball: Cece is an amazing young lady. She is a true example of what a student-athlete should be, and her character has led her to be trusted and respected by her teammates, opponents, and umpires.

Tyler Steelman – boys tennis: Tyler insists on giving the benefit of the doubt and playing fairly in the most intense circumstances, even when the opponent displays less-than-trustworthy characteristics.

Mission Oak High School

Jessica Trujillo – girls swimming: Jessica is a stellar person who always gives her best effort and cares for others.

Isaac Maciel – boys tennis: Isaac is a team captain and four-year player. He competes with integrity and respect. Isaac leads by example, supporting his teammates while also pushing them and holding them accountable.

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To receive the News Gallery Week, sign up [here](#), or contact Jennifer Fisher at jenniferf@tcoe.org or (559) 733-6172.