

Tulare County
Office of Education
Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools

news galleryweek

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Alternative Achievement Program starts new year in new location



Water sprung from the hose and cascaded down to a variety of new plants. A young student holding the hose, focused hard on his important task at the TCOE Liberty Center – the new home of Special Services' Alternative Achievement Program (AAP).

Noticing AAP Administrator Tiffany Stark, he called out “Mrs. Tiffany!” and proudly told her about how he did his job of watering the freshly planted flowers and citrus trees.

“You’re doing a great job,” Stark replied with a smile.

The Alternative Achievement Program provides services to students receiving special education whose behavioral and emotional health requires higher levels of education unavailable at their comprehensive school district sites. At AAP, students receive an alternative learning environment that has embedded mental health services to promote a therapeutic environment necessary to meet students' individual needs.

“Students here need to know they are valued and can succeed,” Stark said.

In its new location, AAP continues to find ways to increase its support of students through a group Mindfulness Room, an individual Therapy Room, and a fun and rewarding Honor Room.

In turn, students are proudly doing their part to beautify their school. Along with watering the plants they helped to plant; students built the wooden flowerbeds that line the yard. Some also

insisted on planting a willow tree, and raising chickens, like they did at their old site next to Blue Oak Academy Charter School. Once larger, the willow tree will be used as a place where students and staff can reflect on their day.

A native garden with a path is also in the works, as well as the acquisition of raised planter beds for vegetables. Staff members also plan to refurbish the school’s kitchen to create learning opportunities around cooking, baking, and food service.

The overarching goal of AAP is to provide intensive individualized instruction. Through extensive therapy and behavioral supports, students obtain the necessary skills to return successfully to a comprehensive education setting.



During the week, students earn points that can be used in their student store at lunch and after school. They are also rewarded with time in the Honor Room which has a gaming system, pool table, foosball table, board games, a future library, and much more. However, the room is for more than just a fun time. In playing alongside each other, Stark said students can connect and make friends while building skills such as patience, sharing, and positive sportsmanship.



The Honor Room also showcases a beautiful example of how AAP students worked together to create a six-foot tall wooden version of the AAP lion. All eight pieces making up the AAP lion were cut and painted at the previous AAP site. The year-long project was led by art therapy specialist Sarah Herman and described as “therapeutic” by one student.

One of the most important lessons taught at AAP is that of service and its rewards. Taught through a “work-for” model, it is a lesson that resonates in all that AAP students do. They serve each other by working together to make their school into what they want it to be. They serve others by cooking together and making sure other staff on site eat first. But most importantly, they serve themselves by continuing to work

with AAP staff and therapists to reach the goals they set for themselves. Through these acts of service, they reach and exceed their goals.

“Students have so many strengths; we have to help them discover them,” Stark said.

For more information on the AAP program, visit <https://tcoe.org/SpecialEducation/AAP>.

Photos above:

~ A student waters freshly planted flowers in a flowerbed built by students at the Alternative Achievement Program in the program's new location at Liberty Center.

~ A student poses for a picture while helping barbeque a hamburger lunch for those on site.

~ Students play in the Honor Room. The Alternative Achievement Program lion hangs in the background.

CHOICES to host next level of threat assessment training

Noted school threat expert John Van Dreal is returning to Tulare County next month to continue his training with school districts. On September 7 and 8, he will lead a two-day training entitled Level 2 Student Threat Assessment for those districts that completed the “Assessing Student Threats” training in February. The focus of the Level 2 training will be on developing a community-based, preventive behavioral threat assessment and management team. In addition to training on how to develop such a team, conference attendees will participate in a variety of threat scenarios with law enforcement in attendance.

For districts eligible to attend the Level 2 training, the deadline to register is September



1. The training is scheduled from 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. September 7 and 8 in TCOE's Redwood Conference Center at 6200 S. Mooney Boulevard. Continental breakfast and lunch will be provided. The cost is \$125 per person. Registration is available at tulare.k12oms.org/159-223005.

For those districts that were unable to attend Van Dreal's "Assessing Student Threats" conference in February, the CHOICES Program can provide that training. District leaders are encouraged to contact Tony Cavanagh, manager for CHOICES School Safety department, at tcavanag@tcoe.org to arrange training.

John Van Dreal is a school psychologist and retired director of Safety and Risk Management Services for the Salem-Keizer School District in Salem, Oregon. Van Dreal now leads a consulting practice, working with school districts and communities on preventive behavioral threat assessment systems and operational security. In 1999, he began the development and implementation for the Salem-Keizer Cascade Model, a multi-agency student threat assessment system considered by experts to be a leading practice.

Van Dreal is the editor and principal author of the book *Assessing Student Threats: Implementing The Salem-Keizer System*, Second Edition. He regularly provides training and consultation to audiences nationally on threat assessment systems, preventing and mitigating human violence, school security, and response options for violent intruder and active shooter situations.

Tulare County school districts welcome new superintendents

Five Tulare County school districts welcomed new superintendents for the 2022-23 school year. **Kirk Shrum**, former chief school leadership officer with Henry County Schools in Georgia, is now the superintendent of Visalia Unified. Shrum replaces Douglas Cardoza, who retired in June.



Former Tulare City School District assistant superintendent **Paula Adair** is now the district's superintendent, succeeding Brian Hollingshead.

Visalia Unified administrator **Roberto Vaca** is the new superintendent at Monson-Sultana Joint Union School, replacing Chris Meyer, who became TCOE's director of Human Resources & Risk Management.

Robert Cardenas, Ed.D., returns to Allensworth School District as interim superintendent. Cardenas previously served the district as recently as 2013.

Sergio C. Chavez, Ed.D. will become the new superintendent of Farmersville Unified on September 1. Chavez succeeds Paul Sevillano, Ed.D., who retired in July.

Around the County

STARBASE Program to be established at Porterville Military Academy



Congressman Kevin McCarthy announced last Thursday the launch of a new STARBASE program, a Department of Defense STEM education program, at the Porterville Military Academy (PMA). Earlier this year, Congressman McCarthy proudly

wrote in support of the application, which the California National Guard submitted on behalf of the Porterville Military Academy.

Since its opening in 2018, PMA's vision has been to develop 21st century leaders, who will be agents of change in business, politics, and public service. With the motto 'Leaders Forged Here,' the charter school currently serves approximately 300 cadets in grades 7-12.

The school also is part of the Porterville Unified School District (PUSD) Pathways program, housing the Academy of Aviation and Leadership. PMA features a classroom with 15 flight simulators as part of the aviation curriculum. This summer, Brady Unruh became the first PMA cadet to attend the Air Force Flight Academy, where he earned his FAA private pilot license.

STARBASE will join Porterville Unified School District's two other offsite STEM/STEAM labs, The Future Ready Lab / Qualcomm® Thinkabit Lab™ and the Garner Holt "AniMakerspace" Lab, to create an immersive educational experience, not just for PUSD students, but for students throughout Tulare County and the Central Valley.

This will be the fifth STARBASE location in California and the launch of the program will allow fifth-grade students to have a place to explore STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) related topics starting in the fall of 2022. The program will engage students with "hands-on, minds-on" experiential activities.

For more information on the STARBASE Program, visit www.dodstarbase.org. For more information the Porterville Military Academy, visit pma.portervilleschools.org.

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