

## **Educators of the Years honorees announced**

On Tuesday, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire and Wendy Jay, a member of the Chinese Cultural Center's Board of Directors, visited the third and final honoree in the annual Educators of the Year program. Two other Educators of the Year were notified on Friday.

Since 1994, the Central California Chinese Cultural Center has partnered with the Tulare County Office of Education to honor one elementary, one middle school, and one high school teacher as part of the Confucius' Birthday/Educators of the Year Awards. Chinese people around the world often mark the occasion of Confucius' birthday in late September by recognizing exemplary teachers. Each year, members of the Chinese Cultural Center hold a dinner celebration at their center in Visalia for the honorees, their colleagues, and family members.

"Each year, it's a delight to visit classrooms and surprise three teachers with the news that they have been selected as Educators of the Year," said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. "This year was no exception. These three educators are exceptional teachers who empower their students to grow and are instructional leaders on their campuses.

The winners of the 2025 Educators of the Year Awards are:



Elementary Educator of the Year  
**Alicia Bovetti, Third-Grade Teacher**  
Rocky Hill Elementary School, Exeter

Alicia Bovetti has spent the past 11 years as a teacher at Rocky Hill Elementary in Exeter. She is currently the grade-level lead for third grade. Rocky Hill principal, Beth Micari, says she has created a system for the third grade where her team meets every Wednesday to collaborate and create an inclusive learning environment. The team shares all of the third-grade students, even splitting up the teaching responsibilities and rotating the students in order to support each other and better serve their needs. This system encourages students' growth and has lessened the need for interventions. Micari describes Bovetti's dedication to mentoring other teachers as unsurpassed. Her classroom is always open to any teacher who may be struggling. She not only welcomes them to observe and learn new skills in her classroom, she follows up to make sure that she can assist them in their classroom as well.

Her passion for nurturing young minds and fostering a love for learning is truly inspiring. Bovetti's involvement in extra activities has built strong relationships with her students, families, and the community. Annually, she organizes student helpers, bounce houses, popcorn, and much more for the school's Halloween festivities. She also fundraises and organizes the third-grade field trip. A couple of days each week, Bovetti can be found tutoring students after school. She is often in attendance at sporting events and birthday parties for her students. She is an invaluable asset to her school and community.





Middle School Educator of the Year  
**Carmen Diaz, Eighth-Grade Teacher**  
Alpaugh Elementary School, Alpaugh

Carmen Diaz has dedicated herself to the students and families of Alpaugh Unified School District as an eighth-grade teacher for the past eight years. Previously, she served as the district librarian, where she expanded her love of literature to bring stories to life for her students. Alpaugh superintendent Troy Hayes says her classroom is a hub of active learning and meaningful engagement. Diaz uses Socratic seminar as her instructional model, which fosters critical thinking and values student perspectives. She facilitates Socratic discussions in every subject, which allows students to come together in small groups and discuss what they have learned. Her ability to connect with and motivate her students ensures that they leave her classroom not only more knowledgeable but also more confident in their abilities.

A lifelong resident of Alpaugh, Diaz's commitment to her community is unparalleled. As a previous student at Alpaugh and the district's only teacher who lives in Alpaugh, all of the students know her from the community. Her ability to build relationships with students, parents, and colleagues creates an inclusive and supportive environment that drives success both in and out of the classroom. She is an active leader in the Alpaugh school community, hosting the eighth-grade graduation ceremony and coaching middle school girls' basketball and volleyball. Her positive impact extends far beyond the classroom walls.



High School Educator of the Year

**Ricardo Florez, Intervention Resource Classroom Teacher**

Tulare Union High School, Tulare

Ricardo Florez has been the Intervention Resource Classroom (IRC) program lead at Tulare Union High School for the past four years. Prior to starting the IRC at Tulare Union, he was the IRC lead at Mission Oak High School in Tulare. His administrator, Roger Robles, praises Florez for his initiative in establishing the program at both high schools. In the early stages of the program at Mission Oak, he asked administrators to send all students who were sent to the office for intervention to be sent to his classroom instead. Soon students began to seek out Florez whenever they needed someone to talk to. Through his mentorship, one of the behavior specialists who assisted him at Mission Oak now leads the team at that site.

At Tulare Union, Florez leads a team that includes two full-time behavior specialists. His classroom is not like traditional classrooms. Instead, you will find couches and beanbags, which help create a welcoming and safe place for students. His principal, Michelle Nunley, Ed.D., says his classroom is a room where students can de-escalate, talk with an adult, get instructional help, or have quiet space. He walks students to class, has lunch with them, talks to them during breaks, and even plays games with students at lunch in a shirt and a tie. Because he supports not just at-risk students, but all students on campus, Florez has become a trusted and respected teacher, mentor, and colleague.

**Awards Event**



A dinner celebrating the 2025 Educators of the Year will be held at the Central California Chinese Cultural Center in September. For a list of past honorees, visit [tcoe.org/EOTY](https://tcoe.org/EOTY).

Photos above:

*Alicia Bovetti (fifth from left) is the 2025 Elementary Educator of the Year. She teaches third grade at Rocky Hill Elementary in Exeter.*

*Carmen Diaz (third from left) is an eighth-grade teacher from Alpaugh Elementary School. She was chosen as the Middle School Educator of the Year.*

*Ricardo Florez (fifth from left) is the High School Educator of the Year. He serves as the Intervention Resource Classroom teacher at Tulare Union High School.*

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## **Save the Date! SCICON Barbecue and Wildflower Festival returns April 13**



The 62nd Annual SCICON Barbecue & Wildflower Festival will be held Sunday, April 13, from 11:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

There is no charge to visit the campus or enjoy the numerous activities, including wildflower walks and entertainment. Springville singer, Patti Torrey, and her country

band, the Irregulars, will be performing in the lodge. Visitors can also enjoy tours of the museum and raptor center.

Tickets for the barbecue luncheon will be available for \$20 per person for adults, \$15 for seniors over 60, \$15 for military with valid ID, and \$15 for children under 12. Cash and credit cards are accepted. Organized by Friends of SCICON, the barbecue raises money to support the SCICON program.

For more information, call (559) 539-2642.

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## Eight teams advance to state Science Olympiad competition

On Saturday, middle and high schools competed in the annual Science Olympiad for the chance to advance to the NorCal Science Olympiad competition in April. Students used chemistry to solve a crime, piloted robots through a maze, used mirrors to bounce light toward a target, and launched aircraft to test their abilities to stay aloft.



The middle school teams that qualified for the state competition include first: Green Acres Middle School (Visalia), second: Ridgeview Middle School (Visalia), third: Live Oak Middle School (Tulare), and fourth: Jefferson Academy (Hanford).



The high school teams advancing to NorCal include first: Redwood High School (Visalia), second: University Preparatory High School (Visalia), third: Mission Oak High School (Tulare), and 4th: Golden West High School (Visalia).



For more information on Science Olympiad, visit [tcoe.org/ScienceOlympiad](https://tcoe.org/ScienceOlympiad).

Photo above:

~ Top: The team from Green Acres Middle School was the top finisher in the middle school category. They will also advance to the state competition next month, along with the teams that placed second, third, and fourth.

~ Bottom: The team from Redwood High School placed first in the high school competition of Science Olympiad on Saturday. They will be joined by the second-, third-, and fourth-place Tulare County teams at the NorCal Science Olympiad next month.

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## Sarvadnya Kadam three-peats in Spelling Championship



Returning champion, Sarvadnya Kadam, an eighth-grade student at Oak Grove Elementary School in Visalia, captured the 2025 Tulare County Spelling Championship last week by spelling “Castilian,” the dialect of Spanish spoken in Castile, which is standard Spanish.

Kadam won the championship in the 20th round. In total, he spelled the following words to win the championship:

breathhtaking  
votive  
escalator  
agalma  
diatribe  
pendragon  
asado  
officinal  
stricture  
leviathan

mecca  
gingivitis  
rebarbative  
desertification  
wobbulator  
drupiferous  
fardel  
catalepsy  
bulgogi  
Castilian

In 26 years of the competition, Kadam is only the second student to win three times. He will represent Tulare County at the Scripps National Spelling Bee in May.



In second place was Isla Jay, an eighth-grade student from Sequoia Middle School in Porterville.

There was a tie for third place between Mica Rivera, an eighth grader at St. Aloysius School in Tulare, and Ava Parrett an eighth grader at Liberty School in Tulare.

Elementary and middle school students from 98 Tulare County schools participated.

Spelling master Scot Hillman, chairman emeritus of JDH in Tulare, reprised his role this year. Hillman has been the spelling master each year since the event's creation in 2000. Carlyn Lambert, retired Visalia Unified administrator, also returned as lead judge, a role she has had since the event's founding. She was joined by Supervisor Amy Shuklian, Tulare County Board of Supervisors, and Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools.

Event sponsor, the Visalia Rawhide, provided family ticket packets to all the participants and alternates.

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## Around the County

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### Monache basketball falls in state semifinal playoffs, Strathmore and Lindsay win Central Section championships





Tulare County had three teams make it to the state playoffs this year, with Monache High School (Porterville) girls basketball making it the farthest.

Monache lost in the CIF Central Section Division II championship, but were the top-seed in the CIF Southern California Division II regional championship bracket. The team's season came to an end Tuesday after being upset 35-25 by seventh-seeded Rancho Bernardo of San Diego. Monache finished the season with a 25-9 overall record, and were also the undefeated East Yosemite League champions.



No. 7 Strathmore High School boys won the CIF Central Section Division V championship with a 45-41 win over No. 5 Granite Hills of Porterville. It was the school's first boys basketball championship since 1937. In the CIF SoCal Regional playoffs, No. 8 Strathmore lost in the second round to No. 1 Wilson of Hacienda Heights. Strathmore finished the season with a 22-12 overall record.





No. 3 Lindsay High School girls basketball upset No. 1 Summit Charter Collegiate Academy of Porterville 44-38 to win the CIF Central Section Division VI title. In the CIF SoCal Regional Division V playoffs, No. 10 Lindsay lost 42-41 to No. 7 Santa Ana. The team finished with a 17-14 overall record.

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## Lindsay, Porterville, Granite Hills soccer teams win Central Section Championships



Three high school boys, and one girls, soccer teams from around Tulare County won a CIF Central Section championship in their respective divisions.

Lindsay High School boys defended its No. 1 seeding with a 2-1 win over No. 10 San Luis Obispo in the CIF Central Section Division II championship game. Ivan Camargo and Jesus Martinez scored for Lindsay. The team's season came to an end in last Thursday's CIF Southern California Division II regional semifinals with a 3-0 loss to top-seeded, and eventual champions, Bishop Amat of La Puente. Lindsay finished the season as East Sequoia League champions with an 8-0 league record and a 27-2-3 overall record.





Porterville High School boys went back-to-back as CIF Central Section Division III champions. Seeded fourth, Porterville beat sixth-seeded Fresno 2-1 with goals from Efren Herrera and Camilio Pulido. In the CIF SoCal Division III, Porterville lost in the first-round to top-seeded, and eventual champions, Harvard-Westlake of Studio City. Porterville finished the season with a 21-4-4 overall record.



Granite Hills High School pulled off a section championship sweep with both boys and girls teams winning a section title. In the boys game, No. 8 Granite Hills defeated No. 3 Nipomo 2-0 – with goals from Carlos Zavala and Fabian Ruiz – for the Division V title. Angelique Gonzalez scored the lone goal in fourth-seeded Granite Hills 1-0 win over sixth-seed Riverdale. Both teams lost in the opening round of their respective state playoff games. The boys finished with a 13-11-2 overall record, while the girls went 15-11-5.





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