



# Fontana Unified School District

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## NEWS RELEASE

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**CONTACT:** Lauren Creiman

(909) 833-9853

## Fontana Unified Celebrates High-Achieving Class of 2022 with Spirited Commencement Ceremonies

**FONTANA, CA** – An arena full of family and friends cheered as colorful streamers fluttered through the air, marking the milestone achievement as Fontana Unified’s Class of 2022 graduates turned their tassels during spirited commencement ceremonies, held at Toyota Arena in Ontario from May 25 to 27.

School pride was on full display as Fontana Unified honored graduates from its five comprehensive high schools, two continuation schools and adult school with energetic ceremonies, featuring passionate speeches from standout students, joyful renditions of the schools’ alma maters, and fist bumps and hugs as graduates thanked their teachers.

The Class of 2022 includes high-performing students who are headed to prestigious institutions across the country – including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, UC Berkeley, Cornell University and the University of Wisconsin at Madison – as well as graduates enlisting in the armed forces and entering the professional world, bolstered by their career technical education training in the District.

### **Citrus High School**

Citrus High School kicked off the District’s commencement ceremonies on May 25, honoring approximately 120 graduates for their perseverance and achievement. Graduates Cristal Castro, Yahir Galdamez and Ryan Tarin reflected on the trials they faced while completing high school and expressed gratitude to their families, friends, teachers and staff.

Amid imparting advice for the future and thanking those who supported him, Galdamez became emotional as he shared that he fulfilled the promise made to his grandfather before he died: to graduate high school. Tarin received encouragement from attendees as he shared his story of dropping out of school, getting in trouble with the law, and getting back on track to complete his education with the help of his family and teachers.

“I am the first in my family to graduate from high school,” Castro said as she addressed her peers. “Today, we are here to celebrate our achievements, and to focus on what we have learned that can make a difference in our future. We cannot build our own futures without helping someone else build theirs. It was never easy to get to where we are, but we dared not to give up.”

### **Eric Birch High School**

Eric Birch High School graduated approximately 80 students during a May 25 ceremony featuring introspective speeches from continuation school students who overcame personal challenges – from battling self-doubt to experiencing homelessness – in their pursuit of a diploma.

Andrew Cuevas, who will attend Chaffey College and pursue his dream of becoming a doctor, earned cheers and applause as he recounted his struggles and celebrated achieving his goal of graduating early.

“I met a lot of great people here at Birch, and it honestly feels like the sun shines brighter here every day,” said Ashley Ruiz, who was recognized during the ceremony for becoming the first Birch High School student to receive both the State Seal of Biliteracy and the District’s Seal of Biliteracy. “I truly believe Birch is a place where people come to remember who they really are, the future of this country. There are not enough words I can find to express my gratefulness. If I could go back in time, I would tell myself to prepare for the greatest year of my high school experience.”

### **A.B. Miller High School**

The festivities continued with A.B. Miller High School’s commencement ceremony on May 25, during which around 450 graduates accepted their diplomas with enthusiasm, sharing intricate handshakes with each other, engaging with the crowd and dancing as they headed back to their seats.

The energetic graduating class was led by valedictorian Juliet Aguh, who will continue her education at UCLA to study statistics; from there, she hopes to pursue a career as a statistician or data analyst.

Aguh was joined at the top of her class by salutatorian Angela Aniciete, who will attend UC San Diego to study biochemistry with the ultimate goal of becoming a chemical pathologist or biochemical researcher. Both Aguh and Aniciete reflected on the challenges their peers experienced during high school and provided words of encouragement as they prepared for their next steps.

“We’ve been through a lot these past few years. Loneliness, low confidence, fear, uncertainty, they were roadblocks in the way of our education,” Aguh said. “School got tough, life got tough. But every student here has managed to work around those difficulties and find another route ... this isn’t the ultimate destination – there’s only greater things to come. But we’ve made it to this first stop, and we should all be proud.”

### **Fontana Adult School**

Fontana Adult School celebrated nearly 90 graduates during an emotionally charged ceremony on May 26, recognizing adult learners for earning their high school diplomas or equivalency diplomas, as well as for completing their studies in the school’s professional pathways and programs.

Class of 2022 graduates Sylvia Pacheco and Zoila Iniguez delivered heartfelt speeches that recounted the circumstances that brought them to Fontana Adult School and the impact the school’s teachers, administrators and staff made on them as they pursued their goals.

Pacheco’s road to completing her high school education took 42 years; she became a mother at 15, was in and out of jail as a young adult, and grieved the death of her first husband. She said a conversation with her grandson – who did not want to continue attending school – inspired her to serve as a role model and complete her high school education.

“When I walked in the [Fontana Adult School] office that day, I saw the purple graduation robe,” Pacheco said. “I truly believed it was a sign from my grandmother that passed. Purple was her favorite color. So I enrolled and my journey began. The friends I made pushed me to do better and not to give up. Fontana Adult School treated me like family, and they went above and beyond to help.”

### **Henry J. Kaiser High School**

Henry J. Kaiser High School honored nearly 460 graduates during a spirited afternoon ceremony on May 27, during which the class cheer of “You know who? Twenty-two!” echoed through the arena and valedictorian Amitoj Lobana and salutatorian Jeanette Ciudad-Real delivered inspirational speeches.

“I ask that you pursue what you are passionate for,” Lobana said to Kaiser High’s Class of 2022. “Perhaps ask yourself, how can this benefit those around me? Sometimes our passions develop when we consider how we can be of service to our community and world ... Strive to become a better version of yourselves every day. You are all achievers and more than deserve your spot here today. Thank you to each and every one of you, and I love you all. “

Lobana, who graduated at just 16 years old, will attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a full-ride scholarship. His time at Kaiser High was spent in dozens of extracurriculars, from tennis and cross country to Academic Decathlon and Pi Club. He will study computer science at MIT and hopes to make a career out of bringing a better quality of life to underrepresented communities.

Ciudad-Real, who also competed in Academic Decathlon and performed with the Kaiser Catamount Pride Band and Color Guard in the 2019 Tournament of Roses Parade – will continue her education at UCLA with a major in sociology. After graduating from college, she plans to research policy solutions for social justice issues.

### **Fontana High School**

Toyota Arena came alive with Steeler pride during Fontana High School’s ceremony on May 26, which honored an estimated 550 graduates. Valedictorian Joel Esparza delivered a passionate speech that thanked every graduate’s family and commended his peers on their determination to succeed.

“For many of us, our parents risked everything to come here and then show us a better future. They left behind decades of memories in their home countries and lost the privilege of being able to feel the hugs of family they will never see again,” Esparza said. “Prior to and during this pandemic, we have experienced loss of both close and distant loved ones. Some of us persevered. Some of us flew by, some of us fumbled, and some of us fell, but we all persevered. Class of 2022, we persevered and are here today to celebrate our richness and resilience.”

At FOHI, Esparza served in the Fontana Conservation Club and the California Scholarship Federation, competed in cross country and dedicated his spare time to volunteering. He is headed to Cornell University, where he plans to major in food science; from there, he hopes to become a scientific researcher or food technologist and bring nutritious foods to low-income communities.

Salutatorian Miranda Ordoñez is a first-generation, college-bound student who served as the District’s 2021-22 Board of Education student representative. Ordoñez was involved in a number of extracurriculars at FOHI, took Advanced Placement courses and prepared for college through the Early Academic Outreach Program and Upward Bound. Ordoñez will attend Mt. San Antonio College next fall.

### **Jurupa Hills High School**

Jurupa Hills High School bid farewell to a senior class full of high-performing students – led by valedictorian Paramjot Singh and salutatorian Jorge Perez Ortiz – on May 27. Singh and Perez reflected on their high school journeys as they addressed approximately 450 of their peers, providing advice for the future punctuated with lighthearted jokes.

“Now is our chance to take control of our lives. From now on, we choose the path we tread,” Perez Ortiz said. “We follow our passions, whatever they may be. It’s not about being different...it’s about being true to yourself. And if that’s what makes you different, then even better! Our aspirations hardly ever align perfectly. That’s the remarkable aspect of our graduating class. Our differences are what we can use to our advantage, and what we will use to our advantage, now, and forever.”

Both Singh and Perez Ortiz will continue their education at University of California campuses. Singh, who will attend UC Santa Barbara and major in biology, plans to become a doctor; Perez Ortiz will major in computer science at UC Riverside and aspires to become a video game designer or software programmer.

### **Summit High School**

Summit High School concluded the District’s commencement festivities on May 27, celebrating the nearly 560 students who formed the District’s largest graduating class this year. At the top of Summit High’s Class of 2022 are co-valedictorians Evelyn Huerta and Jesse Santiago, who will pursue higher education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Huerta, who dedicated her spare time to STEM clubs and activities such as CyberPatriot and SkillsUSA, will continue her education at the California Institute of Technology. There, she plans to study computer science – a key step in her goal of becoming a scientific applications software engineer at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Santiago – whose extracurricular interests ranged from marching band and swim team to Key Club and Academic Decathlon – will attend UC Irvine in the fall, where he plans to major in pharmaceutical studies.

Salutatorian Sean Tobias Verdijo, who rounds out the top of Summit’s Class of 2022, balanced his rigorous academics with involvement in Academic Decathlon, Physics Club, Debate Club and more. Verdijo also has his sights set on a career in STEM; he will major in microbiology at UCLA, with plans to work for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a microbiologist or virologist.

“I think what makes Summit High School unique is our diversity,” Santiago said in his valedictorian’s address. “Among us are students who take pride in our cultural upbringing. Among us are the brightest and most brilliant scholars who have earned honorable distinctions and awards through hard work and perseverance. Because of this diversity, I’m proud to say that I’ve established a family at Summit ... I will miss you all, Summit SkyHawks. Keep on soaring to new heights.”

### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**FUSD\_2021\_GRAD1:** Eric Birch High School students celebrate their graduation as streamer cascade down upon them during a May 25 ceremony.

**FUSD\_2021\_GRAD2:** Summit High School Class of 2022 graduates join hands and celebrate as they receive their diplomas during a commencement ceremony on May 27.

**FUSD\_2021\_GRAD3:** Kaiser High School’s Class of 2022 was led by salutatorian Jeanette Ciudad-Real and valedictorian Amitoj Lobana.

**FUSD\_2021\_GRAD4:** A Jurupa Hills High School graduate gives his peers a thumbs up after receiving his diploma on May 27.