



Fontana Unified School District

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NEWS RELEASE

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Fontana Unified Celebrates Accomplished Class of 2023 with Heartfelt Commencement Ceremonies

FONTANA, CA – Fontana Unified School District provided the Class of 2023 with an emotional sendoff during a series of commencement ceremonies, held May 23 at the Ontario Convention Center and May 24-25 at the Toyota Arena, that featured passionate speeches, joyful cheers, proud renditions of alma maters, colorful streamer cannons and loud applause from loved ones.

The Class of 2023 includes high-performing students who will further their education at colleges and universities across the country – including Columbia University, Boston College, UC Berkeley, UCLA and Stanford University – as well as graduates enlisting in the armed forces and beginning their careers with support from the District’s robust career technical education training.

This year’s graduating class also featured nearly 550 State Seal of Biliteracy recipients; nearly 90 graduates also earned the FUSD Seal of Biliteracy, which has more rigorous requirements to demonstrate bilingualism and biliteracy.

Fontana Adult School

Fontana Adult School kicked off the District’s commencement ceremonies on May 23 with an emotionally charged ceremony.

Graduates Celina John, Julian Marcelo and Idalis Cisneros each delivered inspirational accounts of their journey to Fontana Adult School and reflected on the challenges and tribulations they faced as they sought to complete their education.

“If someone would have told me a year ago that I would be a graduate and giving a speech, I probably would have laughed at them because I started this journey with a sixth-grade education. As a single mom trying to find a stable job, it was time to start working on me,” John said. “I would like to say that was an easy decision, but doing something for yourself never is. I can tell you today that it was so worth it. I am truly excited for my future.”

Eric Birch High School

Eric Birch High School graduates were honored during a May 23 ceremony, featuring introspective speeches from continuation school students who persevered through personal challenges in their pursuit of a diploma.

Class of 2023 graduate Deshay Burt shared her heartfelt thanks to her family and Birch teachers and staff for their unwavering support before offering her peers advice and hope for the future.

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“Thank you to my family for never giving up on me and inspiring me to be the best that I can possibly be,” Burt said. “Let us never give up on our dreams and goals and let this be the start of something greater.”

Fellow graduate Jermaine Montes echoed Burt’s sentiment in his address, which he delivered simultaneously in American Sign Language.

“Thank you to those who were there with me during my time at Birch, you made me the person I am today,” Montes said. “Each of you that faced adversity and won, please take a moment and congratulate yourselves.”

Citrus High School

Citrus High School conferred diplomas to graduates who shared intricate handshakes with each other, engaged with the crowd and danced across the stage in celebration of their achievement on May 23.

Rubi McCrury, one of Citrus High’s 2023 Graduates of the Year, delivered a poignant speech that encouraged her fellow graduates to continue to be resilient in the face of setback and reflected on how the Class of 2023 overcame obstacles on their path to graduation.

“Every graduate here has the training and the talent to succeed, but it’s important to make sure you can get back up when failure hits,” McCrury said. “Failure is a part of life. If you don’t fail, you don’t learn, and if you don’t learn, you will never change. Sometimes you need to take a step back to take a few steps forward.”

A.B. Miller High School

A.B. Miller High School celebrated its graduates during an energetic ceremony on May 24. Among A.B. Miller’s graduates are two recipients of prestigious, highly selective scholarships; valedictorian Vanessa Taylor was awarded the Gates Scholarship, which will fully fund her education, and Maritza Martinez received a \$20,000 scholarship from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation.

In her valedictorian’s address, Taylor – who will attend UCLA to study aerospace engineering – earnestly thanked those who supported her educational journey and encouraged her fellow graduates to savor their last moment together. Salutatorian Lindsay Carlos Flores, who plans to major in bioengineering at UC Riverside, echoed those sentiments and recounted how the Class of 2023 triumphed through adversity.

“I know it has not been easy, having to leave suddenly during our freshman year, isolated from our peers,” Flores said. “If we can take on the stress of a global pandemic and high school at the same time and still succeed and defy expectations, we can take on whatever the world decides to throw at us, no matter how difficult it may seem.”

Fontana High School

Fontana High School honored its graduates with a spirited afternoon ceremony on May 24, during which valedictorian David Munoz-Padilla delivered a memorable reflection on his experience at FOHI, which referenced songs from Taylor Swift and elicited laughs from the arena.

Munoz-Padilla, whose time in Fontana Unified was marked by his commitment to community service and advocacy for education reform, served as the District’s 2022-23 Board of Education student

representative. He will continue his education at Columbia University, where he is considering a major in political science or environmental science.

“We are at a crucial moment, and our lives are marked by our character,” Munoz-Padilla said to his fellow graduates. “At the end of the day, it is important to look at things with pride, rather than regret. I encourage you to take risks with a sense of confidence going forward.”

Munoz-Padilla is joined at the top of his class by salutatorian Lillybeth Banchon, who will attend UC Riverside and double major in music performance and music composition. Two FOHI graduates also received notable scholarships: Jasmin Hurtado-Mendez will attend UC Berkeley and study environmental science after being named a 2023 UC Regents’ and Chancellors’ Scholar, and Josue Arias-Ramirez will study computer science at Boston College on a full-ride Questbridge National College Match scholarship.

Jurupa Hills High School

Toyota Arena thrummed with excitement on May 24 as Jurupa Hills High School conferred diplomas to graduates during a boisterous evening ceremony. Jurupa Hills administrators lauded the graduates for accomplishments that ranged from athletic championships and theatrical successes to high college acceptance rates and thriving career technical education pathways.

Valedictorian Cassidy Barraza and salutatorian Prabjit Basra – who will both attend UCLA in the fall to study business and molecular, cellular and developmental biology, respectively – delivered speeches that championed their classmates and urged them to believe in themselves.

“We no longer need to hold on to our parents’ hands, and we don’t need them to guide us to our new teachers anymore. Now, we can hold our own hand,” Barraza said. “Today we celebrate ourselves, because our hard work got us here. We should all be proud right now, because as we hold our own hands and prepare for our next chapter in life, we can take this moment in and celebrate the fact that we graduated high school.”

Jurupa Hills High School’s Class of 2023 also boasted approximately 30 International Baccalaureate diploma candidates, who completed a rigorous two-year program that develops students’ research and analysis skills in college-level courses.

Summit High School

Hundreds of graduates turned their tassels during Summit High School’s ceremony on May 25, which showcased students’ deep sense of school pride with deafening chants of “Proud to be 23!” and a passionate speech from valedictorian Sophia Golding.

Golding, who will attend Chaffey College to study film and plans to later transfer to UCLA or Cal State Long Beach, encouraged her peers to defy expectations and stereotypes, citing herself as an example.

“We have been conditioned to believe that these grades attached to our names are reflections of our own personal worth,” Golding said. “I am living proof that this means of defining and categorizing students is misleading. We have the choice to choose who we want to be, to challenge these labels that have been given to us in the past 12 years ... This is our chance to learn what we can, not because we have to, but because we want to.”

Golding is joined at the top of Summit's Class of 2023 by salutatorian Thang Phan, who will attend UC Riverside to major in biochemistry and aspires to work in the medical field.

Henry J. Kaiser High School

The District's commencement festivities concluded with Henry J. Kaiser High School's spirited ceremony on May 25, in which a packed arena of proud families cheered, applauded and cried as graduates accepted their diplomas.

Kaiser High School's Class of 2023 is led by valedictorian Adrian Garcia, who will major in political science with a focus on public policy at UC Berkeley, and salutatorian Sebastian Orozco, who will enroll at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to study electrical engineering.

Among this year's graduates are eight other students who will attend UC Berkeley in the fall – pursuing degrees in media studies, aerospace engineering, applied mathematics and computer science, music, literature, molecular and cellular biology, business administration, political science and public health – as well as a graduate headed to Stanford University on a full scholarship.

In his valedictorian's address, Garcia reflected on the supportive community he found at Kaiser, and how it has instilled him with a confidence to speak out and advocate for others.

"I never held the hope that I would be surrounded by people who allow me to express my authentic self," Garcia said. "When I had the chance to go to Kaiser, I knew it was a chance to restart. I now stand before you with the confidence I have gained, being surrounded by those who truly accept me. As we go off into the future, we must ensure that it is one for all of us and utilize our own voices to uplift those whose voices are silenced."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_2023_GRAD1: Jurupa Hills High School salutatorian Prabjit Basra, Gabrielle Ealefoh and valedictorian Cassidy Barraza celebrate their graduation on May 24 at Toyota Arena. All three high-achieving students will attend UCLA in the fall.

FUSD_2023_GRAD2: Streamers cascade through the air as Citrus High School graduates turn their tassels during a May 23 commencement ceremony at the Ontario Convention Center.

FUSD_2023_GRAD3: A Fontana High School Class of 2023 graduate spots his family in the audience as he walks across the stage during a May 24 commencement ceremony at Toyota Arena.

FUSD_2023_GRAD4: Summit High School salutatorian Thang Phan and valedictorian Sophia Golding throw their arms up in triumph and celebrate their accomplishments before Summit's commencement ceremony on May 25.

FUSD_2023_GRAD5: Kaiser High School Class of 2023 graduates walk arm in arm to their seat after receiving their diplomas during a May 25 ceremony.

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