

# Bonita Unified

## SCHOOL DISTRICT

115 W. Allen Ave. San Dimas, CA 91773 ★ (909) 971-8200 ★ [do.bonita.k12.ca.us/](http://do.bonita.k12.ca.us/)

### NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## Bonita Unified Honors Exceptional Class of 2023 with Spirited Commencement Ceremonies

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – Under dramatic theater lights and skies filled with cascading streamers, nearly 750 graduates turned their tassels and tossed their caps into the air during commencement ceremonies that celebrated the triumphs achieved, challenges experienced and memories made by Bonita Unified's Class of 2023.

The ceremonies showcased the graduates' excellence in their academic, athletic, artistic and extracurricular endeavors, from state awards for leadership and CIF championships to prestigious scholarships and nationally recognized culinary programs. Bonita Unified's Class of 2023 features high-achieving graduates who will continue their education at institutions such as UCLA, UC Berkeley and Purdue University, as well as those who will enlist in armed forces or enter the workforce.

"The Class of 2023 has created an exceptional legacy of achievement and exemplified what it means to live their purpose," Bonita Unified Superintendent Matt Wien said. "We are proud of all of our graduates and wish them the best in their future academic and professional endeavors."

Chaparral-Vista High School kicked off the festivities on June 6, holding an emotionally charged ceremony at the Bonita Center for the Arts that honored 46 students who overcame a myriad of challenges on their path to graduation. The continuation school graduates were rewarded with deafening cheers, emotional hugs and tears of joy from teachers, staff, family and friends as they accepted their diplomas and received scholarships for their resilience, outstanding citizenship, academic improvement and more.

Chaparral graduates responded in kind; Aidan Quintana, Valerie Kapitan and Natalie Bolanos delivered heartfelt and introspective speeches that expressed their gratitude to the school's teachers, staff and administrators for their unwavering support. All three graduates plan to further their education in college before pursuing careers in business, forensic psychology and social work, respectively.

"The first time I walked through our gates at Chap, I had already given up on the idea of having a future; I was just trying to survive the rest of high school," Kapitan said. "After my first day, I knew that I had made the right choice by coming here. I finally felt like I fit in somewhere, and that I had people in my corner. I want to say thank you to all of the staff members who make it known that students are valued and teach us that we're human beings, not numbers and grades in a system. I'll always be grateful for the family I've become a part of here at Chap."

Saints Stadium was abuzz with excitement as San Dimas High School honored approximately 280 graduates on June 6. The spirited ceremony featured an uplifting performance by a band of students and graduates, the national anthem performed in sign language, and inside jokes shared among students and staff.

**MORE**

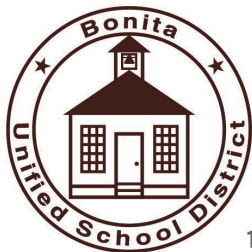


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San Dimas High School's accomplished senior class – which featured 8 students who maintained an unweighted 4.0 GPA for all four years – was led by valedictorian Akhil Bhakta, holding a 4.70 GPA, and salutatorian Kareem Jouzy, with a 4.64 GPA. Bhakta and Jouzy delivered refreshingly honest speeches that reflected on the mistakes they made, the lessons learned and their advice for the future, which drew laughs from graduates, families and staff.

“As a kid, you're always asking yourself ‘why?’ and by questioning, you put yourself in the position to learn and see the world in a different light and find new joys,” Jouzy said as he addressed his peers. “As an adult you may think now it's no longer the time for questions ... this is simply not true. The world has so much joy in it for you just waiting to be uncovered...all you have to do is be curious enough to reach out and grab it.”

Bhakta will further his education at UC Irvine and Jouzy will study mechanical engineering at UC Santa Barbara.

Bonita High School's Class of 2023 was celebrated with pomp and circumstance, streamer cannons and jubilant cheers from friends and family during its June 8 commencement. Approximately 420 graduating students performed impromptu dances, pointed to the stands in gratitude or hugged their teachers as they received their diplomas.

Bonita High Principal Kenny Ritchie spoke to the graduates about being passionate in their lives and embracing wherever that passion leads them. Ritchie cited the example of graduating senior Taegen Maysasmi, who channeled the disappointment of a sports injury into a new passion: photography. Ritchie played a 90-second montage of Maysami's photos of Bonita campus life, to the delight of the graduates and their families.

Bonita High celebrated its top scholars, honoring 17 students who have unweighted GPAs of 4.0, including valedictorian Anthony Serven, with a 4.67 GPA and salutatorian Andrew Zhang, boasting a 4.65 GPA. Both gave stirring speeches congratulating their classmates on their achievements, while urging them to not give up as they face new challenges.

“The beauty of life is that for every mountain we summit, we get a new perspective of the world below our feet, a new goal to dedicate our lives to, and new people that we meet along the way,” Serven said. “I implore you all, find those values, realize those goals, learn something you've wanted to learn, do something you've dreamed of doing.”

Serven will attend UC Berkeley and major in applied mathematics; Zhang will study aerospace engineering at UC Irvine.

### PHOTO CAPTIONS:

**BUSD\_GRAD1:** San Dimas High School graduates Cora Averweg and Hailey Ornelas wave to family during the processional of the school's commencement ceremony, held June 6.

**BUSD\_GRAD2:** San Dimas High graduate Ethan Chavez points to the sky in triumph during the June 6 commencement.

**BUSD\_GRAD3:** Chaparral High School graduate Semaj Randell thanks staff as he crosses the stage on June 6.

**BUSD\_GRAD4:** Chaparral High graduate Lilyana Correa is adorned with leis by her family after the ceremony on June 6.

**BUSD\_GRAD5:** Bonita High graduate and former Board of Education student representative Grishm Sethi hugs Superintendent Matt Wien during the school's June 8 commencement.

**BUSD\_GRAD6:** Bonita High School graduate Ana Cruz is all smiles after receiving her diploma on June 8.



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