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Bonita Unified Graduates Share Stories of Triumph, Resilience During 2025 Commencement Ceremonies

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – More than 800 graduates from Chaparral-Vista, San Dimas, and Bonita high schools tossed their caps into the evening air as celebratory music swelled, earning thunderous applause during commencement ceremonies on June 3 and 5 that showcased the culture of each campus, shared stories of perseverance, and honored the achievements of Bonita Unified's Class of 2025.

Each high school celebrated graduates' academic, artistic, and athletic successes, noting CIF championships, a national culinary title, regional and state honors for music, and more. Bonita Unified graduates will pursue higher education at institutions including Notre Dame University, UC Berkeley, Columbia University, Syracuse University, USC, and UCLA; others will enlist in the armed forces or enter the workforce, bolstered by the skills developed in the District's career technical education pathways.

Chaparral-Vista High School kicked off the commencement festivities on June 3 at the Bonita Center for the Arts, celebrating 32 graduates who overcame personal or academic challenges on their path to graduation.

The continuation school graduates laughed and cheered as four of their peers – Aedin Elijah-Urbina Ortega, Sofia Bejarano, Ryan El-Khoury, and Marissa Widen-Hernandez – delivered speeches filled with humorous anecdotes, poignant reflections on their triumph over adversity, heartfelt thanks to Chaparral-Vista teachers and staff, and words of encouragement for their peers.

"This diploma is more than paper; it's proof of our resilience, our perseverance, and our grit," Bejarano said. "As we move forward, the world will offer us choices. Let's choose courage over comfort, authenticity over approval, and purpose over perfection. The future isn't something we enter; it's something we create. We have questioned who we are and who we want to be and what truly matters, and somewhere between all the obstacles in life leading up to today, we have found pieces of ourselves."

San Dimas High School honored 318 seniors on June 3 at Saints Stadium during a spirited ceremony that featured a performance of "Lean on Me" by graduate Brielle Salles-Thompson. The celebration, which invited impactful elementary, middle, and high school teachers to attend, also included inspiring speeches from valedictorian Kianush Zamiri, who will attend UCLA, and salutatorian Gargeya Smruti Ranjan, who will major in computer science at Cal Poly Pomona.

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Gargeya Smruti Ranjan's address reflected on his arrival to Bonita Unified as a transfer student from India, with no knowledge of the culture or the language, and his growth at San Dimas High School, where he became involved in tennis, Science Olympiad, chess club, and as a tutor in math and physics.

"I went from a bright student to simply struggling to keep up," Gargeya Smruti Ranjan said. "But eventually thanks to the faculty and my friends, I was able to finally find my footing. It didn't happen overnight, or in giant leaps, it happened in quiet moments of persistence, where each day I grew just a little stronger, a little braver, and a little more confident. We've all faced challenges – some visible, some hidden, but how we face them is what matters and defines us. Each one has shaped us to become who we are today."

The District's commencement celebrations concluded on June 5 with Bonita High School, which recognized 453 graduates in a sunset ceremony at Glenn Davis Stadium featuring a fireworks display. The Class of 2025 invited elementary and middle school teachers to join the ceremony alongside Bonita High teachers, recognizing the impact they made on their lives. Many teachers were mentioned in the speeches delivered by the graduates, including an earnest speech from Rayan Abouchacra, who came to Bonita High from Lebanon as a 15-year-old unfamiliar with the language and culture.

"I remember sitting in my first class, trying to keep up, feeling lost and out of place," Abouchacra said. "But with time, support, and some serious determination, I slowly found my footing. It wasn't easy. There were late nights translating tough lessons just to understand them, and times when I had to push myself even harder just to catch up. But every challenge taught me something. Every setback helped me grow. And standing here today, I can honestly say — I didn't just survive high school, I thrived. Bonita High School has truly been such a great place to be ... This school didn't just give me an education — it gave me a community."

Bonita High's Class of 2025 was led by 16-year-old valedictorian Jayden Leung and salutatorian Rakshitha Akkala, who will both attend UCLA to study applied mathematics and business economics, respectively.

PHOTOS:

BUSD_CLASSOF2025_1: San Dimas High School graduates cheer in delight and throw their caps in celebration as streamers cascade through the air during a June 3 ceremony at Saints Stadium.

BUSD_CLASSOF2025_2: Chaparral-Vista High School graduates cheer and cry as they toss their caps in the air during the school's June 3 commencement ceremony at the Bonita Center for the Arts.

BUSD_CLASSOF2025_3: A Bonita High School graduate waves to his family in the stands as he walks in the processional of the June 5 commencement ceremony.

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