



# Santa Barbara County Education Office

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## **State elevates importance of civic engagement with seal on high school diplomas**

*By Dr. Susan Salcido, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools*

High school diplomas across California will soon reflect the importance of civic engagement with a special seal. We are one of the first states to include this valuable component of high school education.

Much like the state Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes high school students for a high level of proficiency in languages in addition to English, the Seal of Civic Engagement will acknowledge graduating seniors for their engagement in civics, social studies, and government, as well as their participation in the community.

The seal will symbolize the importance of high-quality civics education to students and affirm the value of their community service projects and volunteer work.

The seal will also acknowledge our common values and beliefs. At the heart of our American democracy lies our deep belief that our voices and actions as citizens are critical components of our past, present, and future. I am grateful that our children learn about César Chávez, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr. while in school; they also learn from an early age that their input — just like the great men and women before them — is what creates the engagement essential for America's future.

Abraham Lincoln's phrase from 200 years ago, "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people," is the essence of civics education and remains an important part of California's school curriculum. That is why high school diplomas will soon reflect its importance with a distinguished seal.

In Santa Barbara County, we can be proud that students have opportunities to apply lessons of past generations to current projects. In fact, students have multiple platforms in which to enhance their civic knowledge, and these experiences can be an integral part of the process while learning about it.

Here are a few examples:

At San Marcos High School in Santa Barbara, economics students work to help kids in need. Since 2002, “Kids Helping Kids” has been an entirely student-run, nonprofit organization. They’ve raised and invested more than \$3.1 million in the lives of youth needing socio-economic and physical support, both locally and globally.

Erick Pinedo Tovar, a student at Pioneer Valley High School in Santa Maria, was named 2019 California Coastal Area Youth of the Year by the Santa Maria Boys and Girls Clubs. He is active in the Keystone Club, a teen group dedicated to community service and building leadership skills. To date, he’s completed over 500 service hours. He plans to major in psychology at UC Berkeley so he can continue to help others. In the process of volunteering, he’s found a passion which will impact his future, and ours.

Recently, I met with Montecito teen Grace Matthews, who was seeking ways to influence more residents to sign up for “Aware and Prepare” emergency alerts. This wasn’t her first foray into impacting her community. Several years ago, she was instrumental in finding ways for students from around the county to screen the documentary, “He Named Me Malala,” the story of Malala Yousafzai, the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize winner, and an advocate for education.

While there are many exceptional civics projects we can celebrate, we know we can do more for all. Public schools countywide aim to cultivate a lifelong commitment to civic participation, so our youth become active members of vibrant communities seeped in civil civic discourse, action, debate, and elevated diplomacy.

In the near future, when high school graduates earn Seals of Civic Engagement on their diplomas throughout California, we will formally recognize all the work that students, teachers, and schools have put into these projects. Until then, let us continue to recognize our youth in our own ways, providing opportunities for our students to be civically engaged, participating in their youth-led organizations, and modeling positive interactions with our communities and with one another.

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