

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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For Immediate Release

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Tulare County Office of Education Announces:

La Sierra Porterville Student Wins in National Essay Contest

Jamie Belcher, a sophomore at La Sierra High School in Porterville, won first place in her grade category at the national **Foundations for Life** essay program. Jamie received a perfect score on her essay, which was one of hundreds written by students throughout the nation. Scholarships in the form of \$1,000 savings bonds were recently awarded to the ten top winning students in grades three through 12. For the contest, students choose a famous quotation from a select list and write about what it means to them. Jamie chose the quote: "The day you quit school, you condemn yourself to a future of poverty," which is attributed to renowned Los Angeles teacher Jamie Escalante. **Foundations for Life** was developed by the nonprofit Josephson Institute of Ethics, creators of the CHARACTER COUNTS! program.

"We are all proud of Jamie's accomplishment," says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. "This was the first year students from Tulare County participated in the annual contest. Her win reinforces the fact that we have some wonderfully talented students in our schools." La Sierra is a traditional high school chartered by the Tulare County Office of Education currently with campuses in Porterville, Visalia and Pixley.

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The Tulare County Office of Education held its first countywide **Foundations for Life** competition in February. Jamie's essay – along with three others – was chosen to compete in the national competition. The Tulare County Office of Education will distribute information to schools about the **2007 Tulare County Foundations for Life** Contest later this year.

The national competition is only one aspect of **Foundations for Life**, which offers many free tools to educators — from monthly lesson plans and weekly writing prompts to comprehensive manuals for teachers and local contest organizers. Educators and community organizers use its materials and services as they choose, with the optional national contest being a great way to motivate kids. **Foundations for Life** encourages critical thinking, which improves writing skills – preparing students taking standardized tests.

Jamie Belcher's winning essay can be viewed at www.FFL-essays.org. For further information on Tulare County Office of Education programs, visit www.tcoe.org, or call Robert Herman, Public Information Officer, at (559) 733-6606. Teachers interested in more information on **Foundations for Life**, can contact CHARACTER COUNTS! Coordinator Kelley Petty at (559) 740-4303.

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