



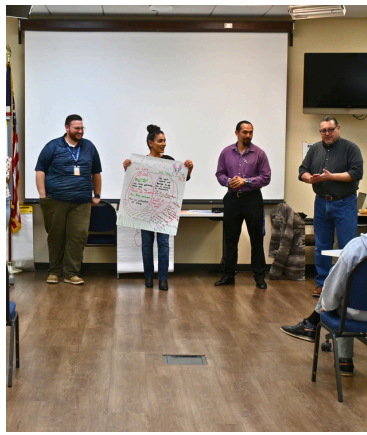
## Stronger Together: Inspiring Leadership by Building Bridges and Opening Doors

The **Merced County Office of Education (MCOE)** is proud to support the important work of California Community Schools through its core values of Nurture, Serve, and Lead. Leadership and Systems advances this work through a clear vision centered on inspiring leadership, building bridges, and opening doors. The five goals of Leadership and Systems are: **Leadership Support, Professional Development (Trainer of Trainers Model), Cross Collaboration, Coaching and Mentoring, and Leadership Capacity Development.**



Guided by the values of Nurture, Serve, and Lead, the Merced County Office of Education is committed to building capacity across all systems. Central to this effort is the development of collaborative teams, which serve as a strong foundation for long-term organizational success. The Leadership and Systems initiative aligns MCOE's core values, systems thinking, and team development to strengthen and support the Community Schools Framework.

## Growing School and Community Relationships for Student and Family Success



On March 13, 2026, Community School Leaders and community partners from across the county gathered at MCOE for a Community of Practice. The event created space to connect, collaborate, and share resources in support of Community Schools. The focus of the day was to celebrate success and highlight the strength of our collective work. Using a strengths-based approach, participants reflected on personal successes and engaged in thoughtful dialogue around three key questions connected to the Needs and Assets Assessment: What do you love about our schools, community, or community of practice? What is our vision for our schools, communities, or community of practice? And what next steps can we take to bring that vision to life?

Community-based partners play an important role in supporting the success of Merced County students and families. During the session, representatives from Cultiva Central Valley, NAMI, Merced Mini Corps, and the California Health Collaborative shared resources and services available to support students and families. This time together helped deepen relationships between schools and community organizations, increase awareness of valuable resources, and strengthen collaboration in support of students and families. These shared efforts continue to build a stronger network of opportunity across the community.

# INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION THROUGH FORENSICS: LOOKING DEEPER INTO THE MYSTERY OF LEARNING

An exciting example of Centering Community-Based Learning is the collaboration between MCOE's Tobacco Use Prevention and Education (TUPE) program and Merced Union High School District (MUHSD). Through a dynamic Career Technical Education (CTE) Forensics program, high school students are learning advanced scientific concepts while developing as future leaders, teachers, and role models. In partnership with MUHSD, including Buhach Colony High School, students explore health and wellness in alignment with the vision of the TUPE program. Students are introduced to forensic science through hands-on activities and real-world applications. From analyzing evidence to understanding investigative techniques, they experience learning in ways that are relevant and community connected.



This collaboration is making a meaningful impact. Younger Students are becoming more excited about science and future career possibilities, while high school students are strengthening their leadership and communication skills. At the same time, the partnership is creating a pathway for continued interest in the MUHSD Forensics CTE program and opening dialogue and education around tobacco, vaping, and dangerous narcotics such as fentanyl. This is what building bridges and opening doors looks like in action!

## SAFE PROGRAM: SUPPORTING ATTENDANCE AND FAMILIES THROUGH EDUCATION

On March 5, 2026, the Merced County District Attorney's Office, in collaboration with the MCOE, brought together families and community-based organizations to support student attendance through education. This effort reflected the community schools approach by strengthening partnerships among schools, families, and community agencies to support students. Parents participated in workshops that built knowledge and connected them with community resources that promote regular attendance and student well-being.



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