



Supporting Whole-Child Success  
Across the Central Valley

January 2026



El Nido Elementary School District doing some amazing work at CEI!

## Building Family, Belonging, and Community at Dario Cassina High School

Each December, **Dario Cassina High School** in Sonora, part of the Sonora Union High School District, transforms into more than a campus. It becomes a true community hub. Through its annual Christmas Feast, the school brings together students, families, staff, and partners in a way that reflects the heart of a community schools approach. The focus is on strengthening relationships, creating spaces and meeting needs where students feel seen and valued. The tradition began with a simple but sobering insight. When staff once asked students how they spent Thanksgiving, many shared that they did nothing at all. That moment sparked a commitment to address students' social and emotional well-being by creating meaningful, inclusive experiences. The Christmas Feast grew from that commitment, offering not just a meal, but connection, dignity, and joy.



The event is planned and led by a dedicated team including Principal Robert Mayben, Secretary Donna Berry, Community Schools Coordinator Erin Foucht, and Donna's mother, Granny Jane, along with school staff and community volunteers. A cornerstone of the celebration is the student-centered Christmas thrift store, curated year-round by Donna Berry and Granny Jane. Each student selects five gifts to give to loved ones, reinforcing pride, agency, and the power of giving back. These are key elements of student voice and leadership.

Students help prepare and serve the meal alongside staff and guests, reflecting Cassina's commitment to shared leadership and responsibility. For many students, a family-style holiday meal is rare, making the gathering especially meaningful. Community partnerships are vital to the event's success. Local organizations and individuals contribute food, gifts, funding, and time, putting integrated student support into action and strengthening connections beyond the campus. Over time, the Christmas Feast has become more than a celebration—it has shaped Cassina's culture. Students support one another, hold each other accountable, and continue to improve the event each year. Through this tradition, Dario Cassina High School lives its community schools vision, creating a place where relationships matter, partnerships thrive, and every student belongs. Christmas at Cassina is not just a moment; it's a shared commitment to community.



# STUDENT VOICE IN ACTION: BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH LEADERSHIP

The Fresno County Youth Advisory Board (FCYAB) met on November 18, 2025, for its first in person gathering of the school year at the Fresno City College West Campus. This convening marked an important milestone, bringing student leaders together to build relationships, share perspectives, and strengthen their collective voice in ways that align with a Community Schools approach.



The FCYAB includes students from 13 high schools across Fresno County. Each member applied to serve on the Board with a shared commitment to identifying change ideas that can improve outcomes for their schools and communities. The Board was envisioned by Jaspreet Sahota, a graduate of Sanger West High School, who recognized the importance of student agency, leadership, and partnership in shaping systems that better support young people. These values mirror the core principles of Community Schools, centering student voice and shared responsibility.

Throughout the school year, the 24 student members are supported by Damion Delton and Marisa Gamboa, Executive Leadership Coaches with the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. Together, they support students as they build leadership skills, engage in collaborative problem solving, and use improvement science to improve student outcomes across the Valley, while contributing to conversations about student well-being, school culture, and community connection.



The Board extends sincere appreciation to Fresno City College West Fresno Campus for hosting the convening and creating a welcoming space for learning and collaboration. Gratitude is also extended to the student board members for their enthusiasm and commitment, as well as to their site administrators and Dr. Michele Cantwell Copher, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, for ongoing support. This year's FCYAB represents students from Caruthers, Central, Clovis North, Coalinga, Crescent View West, Design Science Middle College, Edison, Fresno, Patino School of Entrepreneurship and University High School, Laton, Riverdale, and Sanger High Schools.

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## Keep Your Team Connected!

CCSPP grantees and community partners, help us keep everyone informed. If your team has new members, changes in staff, or updated emails, please share your current contact list so no one misses our weekly updates.

✉ Email updates to [cvrtac@fcoe.org](mailto:cvrtac@fcoe.org)

