Association of California School Administrators

Dr. Ben Howell - 2026-2027 President, ACSA Region 7

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The 2026–2027 school year has officially launched, the initial kickoff is behind us, and education across our region is in full swing! Fall is upon us, and there has never been a better time to dig in, get involved, and actively participate in the great work happening across Region 7.

From our first General Membership Assembly with State ACSA President Dr. René Rickard, to our sold-out Classified Educational Leaders event (over 900 tickets sold in less than 40 hours—WOW!), to our inspirational mini-conference at the end of October, there is so much happening. We want each leader in our region to be an active participant and experience the drive and connection of leading together.

This fall has provided a tremendous opportunity to showcase each charter's intentional work in outreach, leadership support, and community connection:

San Joaquin: Exploring the essential dimensions of effective leadership.

Stanislaus: Intentionally listening to and elevating student voice.

Tuolumne: Amplifying the message and voice of our classified support staff.

Mother Lode: Purposefully fostering connection and camaraderie among members.

While each charter is unique, they all share one resounding message: "You belong here!"

These local connections are growing across our entire region. The intentional work in our charters perpetuates and drives our broader regional momentum. I feel it, our charter leaders feel it, and I am confident that new members peering into this work with curiosity feel that hopefulness too. It is exciting work to witness—and even more exciting to be a part of with you.

In addition to these successes, I am proud to share the exciting new pathways our regional leadership is forging to recruit and support aspiring administrators. Our new member outreach event at Camp 4 in Modesto was not only a success in building relationships, but also an inspiring display of our team's commitment to the next generation. We are sending a clear message to future leaders that "You belong here," and Region 7 will always be a space that helps you learn, thrive, connect, and grow. We look forward to sharing more about these initiatives in the coming months!



It is an honor and a privilege to serve alongside you in Region 7. No matter your charter, position, title, or role in this work, you belong here! Keep leaning in, and keep leading strong!

Ben Howell, Ed.D, Superintendent
Summerville Elementary School District & ACSA Region 7 President

MISSION STATEMENT

"The mission of the Association of California School Administrators is to advocate in the best interests of students and to develop, empower and inspire equity-minded educational leaders."

Be sure to visit our website (http://regions.acsa.org/7/) and stay up-to-date on Region 7 and Charter events as well as committee and council reports and more!

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REGION 7 CHARTER REPORTS

Mother Lode Charter
by Jessica Dorris
Mother Lode Charter President

The Mother Lode Charter kicked off the new school year with a Back-to-School Social, which was held at Miner's Lounge in Angels Camp. This was a small gathering, but attending educators enjoyed networking and contributing ideas for professional learning topics that would be the greatest benefit to administrators.

Our Charter Fall professional development program was held on October 20th and was facilitated by Norma Wallace, Executive Director of the Tuolumne JPA. As a result of collaborative planning during the Back-to-School Social, this professional development focused on the policies that impact schools, why such policies exist, and how administrators can effectively engage with staff around the importance of policy adherence.

Retired Administrators Charter
by Barbara Magpusao
RAC Charter President

We had our first meeting on September 1st at SCOE with an incredible presentation by Scott Kuykendall, Stanislaus County Superintendent of Schools. The topic of his presentation was, "Stanislaus, Rewired and Inspired." Scott's presentation highlighted the book, *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt. The data from the book focuses on the period from 2010-2015.
The data showed a rise in depression and suicide rates among teens globally. We need to separate ourselves from our phones. Scott is very passionate about this topic and will offer his presentation to whoever will listen.
Our meetings for 2026-2027 are scheduled as follows:
November 3rd - Dan Krause at Spring Creek Country Club, Ripon
December 1st - Christmas Social at Mary Ann's House
December 12th - Another Christmas Social at Mary Ann's Cabin then off to Sierra Repertoire Theater: Shrek Christmas Musical
January 15th - Winter Social/Membership Drive at The Water Office in Patterson starting at 12:30 pm.
February 2nd - Travel Ideas and Stories at Spring Creek Country Club, Ripon
April 6th - Speaker TBA at Spring Creek Country Club, Ripon
June 1st - Speaker TBA at Spring Creek Country Club, Ripon
All meetings begin at 11:30 am.
*If you are retired or soon to be retired and would like to get involved, please come to a meeting. I am looking forward to meeting new members.

San Joaquin Charter
by Megan Smith
San Joaquin Charter President

Connecting, Engaging, and Growing Together

The San Joaquin Charter has had an exciting start to the year! Our August kickoff provided a wonderful opportunity to bring members together, reconnect with colleagues, and welcome the new school year with a shared focus on cultivating belonging and strengthening our professional community.

As we move into the year, we are continuing to look for ways to engage our members, nurture meaningful connections, and create opportunities for professional learning and leadership development. We are excited to build on the momentum of our kickoff and encourage our many new members to take advantage of the various opportunities available through ACSA.

We look forward to a year of connection, collaboration, and continued growth—and to making this a meaningful year for our San Joaquin Charter ACSA community!

Stanislaus Charter
by Janelle DeGreek
Stanislaus Charter President

A heartfelt thank you to the 255 attendees who made our ACSA kickoff on August 24th at the Commemorative Air Force Hangar a resounding success! We were honored to welcome ACSA Region President Dr. Ben Howell, alongside two inspiring high school student speakers who delivered a powerful reminder, "You Belong Here."

As the year has progressed, we have had two fantastic Professional Developments. In September we welcomed, Lt. Godfrey from Ceres Police Department to discuss e-bike safety and how to be traffic safe around our school campuses. In October, "The Shining Star Project" came to discuss a performing arts program that can come into schools to inspire creators of all abilities.

We are excited to host our November Professional Development where we will have Stanislaus administrators share about Belonging in Action and the impactful work that is happening across our region.

GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY

Tuolumne Charter
by Gabe Wingo
Tuolumne Charter President

The Tuolumne County Association of California School Administrators (TCACSA) has had a busy start of the school year.

We held our fall Kick Off at the Standard Pour, welcoming a number of administrators who are new to our county and starting the school year in new positions.
Brett Christopher - Superintendent, Summerville HS
Karisa Scott - Principal, Summerville HS
Flora Savage - Associate Principal, Sonora HS
Jessica Cook - Special Education Director, Sonora HS
Amy Smothers - Principal, Curtis Creek Elementary
Sarah Elliott - Assistant Principal, Curtis Creek Elementary
Echo Kayser - Assistant Principal, Twain Harte School
David Smith - Assistant Superintendent, Big Oak Flat-Groveland Unified School District
Iva Fitzsimmons - Program Director, Tuolumne County Office of Education
Rachel Ceja - Program Director, Tuolumne County Office of Education

We also introduced our new VP of membership Chris Boyles, Principal of Summerville Elementary School. It was a wonderful afternoon of fellowship and visiting with colleagues.

We hosted our annual Administrative Assistants Dinner on October 6 where we gathered together to celebrate the employees at our schools who do so much for our staff and students.

In November we will hold our Fall PDP where we will learn more about strengthening the instructional strategies of our staff and improve the academic progress of our students specifically in math.

The 2026-27 school year is off to a good start up in Tuolumne County.



"If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then you are a leader."

- Dolly Parton

Nominations Open for ACSA Awards

The 2027 ACSA Awards Program is now open for nominations! We encourage Region 7 members to recognize the outstanding administrators, school leaders, and educational partners who make a difference in our schools and communities.

To submit a nomination for an ACSA Region 7 award, visit the ACSA Awards website or the Region 7 web page under Awards.

The Region 7 Awards Committee will select winners in the following categories:

- Administrator of the Year categories
- Ferd J. Kiesel Memorial Distinguished Service Award
- Marcus Foster Memorial Award for Administrator Excellence
- Robert E. Kelly Award
- Valuing Diversity Award
- Partners in Educational Excellence Award

New this year: The Administrator of the Year categories will include Early Education Administrator, recognizing leadership in early learning.

Another important change is that nominations for the Ferd J. Kiesel Memorial Distinguished Service Award and the Marcus Foster Memorial Award for Administrator Excellence will now be submitted through Region 7 for consideration, rather than directly to State ACSA as in previous years.

Region 7 award recipients will be honored at our Annual Spring Conference in May. Nominations for Region 7 School Boards and School Board Trustees must also be submitted through our Region 7 Awards web page. Recipients will be recognized at the Annual Spring Conference. Deadline for all nominations is January 21, 2027, at 11:59 p.m.

START YOUR NOMINATIONS TODAY!!



Effective School Solutions

parallel

I Want To Make One Thing Clear - We Notice



Two students from Central Valley High School in Ceres spoke at the Stanislaus Charter Kick-off, Brittania Barahona Soto and Michael Jackson. Their topic "We Notice." We notice when you take the time to greet us by name in the hallway. We notice when you show up to cheer us at games, concerts, plays and competitions. We notice when you visit our classrooms and ask us how our day is going. These brief interactions carry real weight. They remind us that we are seen, valued and supported.

As students, we count on our school doors to open every morning, but we don't always see the immense effort it takes to keep everything running. It takes late nights, early mornings, and unwavering accountability and dedication. Everyone is responsible for building a positive school culture that supports students, staff and handling the complex logistics behind the scenes so that teachers can teach and students can learn. It takes dedicated leaders to keep pouring into others day after day; many times, over your own families. Because you take care of so many things behind the scenes, students like me can walk on to campus ready to learn, to lead and think about building our futures

On behalf of students, thank you. Thank you for your relentless effort you put in, and for the heart you bring to work every single day. YOU MATTER!

Mini Conference Inspires Educational Leaders Across the Region

By Kristin Lilly-Porter

Educational leaders and administrators from across ACSA Region 7 gathered for an evening of professional learning, collaboration, and high-energy networking. Designed to equip site leaders with practical strategies to strengthen school culture and support student success, the event featured a dynamic roster of breakout sessions led by local experts.

The evening opened with registration, refreshments, and welcome remarks by Dr. Ben Howell - Region 7 President, setting an inspiring tone before attendees headed into their breakout rooms.

Session 1 Highlights

- Shaun Hurtado: The Secret Sauce: How Exceptional Customer Service Shapes School Culture
- Kristen Panou & Laura Granger: Partner, Promote, Empower: Site Leadership & the CAC Connection
- Guillermo Lopez Romo: English Learners- A Case for Levelized ELD
- Tiffany Sellars, Ph.D.: You Belong Here: Building an MTSS System Where Every Student Has a Place

Session 2 Highlights

- Mustafa al Bayaty & Arti Narayan, Ed.D.: From Burnout to Belonging: Building the Principal & Admin Team Partnership That Reduces Stress and Brings the Fun Back to Leadership
- Kirstin Marble: Designing Without Barriers: UDL, Title II, and the Next Era of Digital Accessibility
- Melissa Stone: From Presence to Purpose: Making Push-In Count
- Antony Little, Fallon Ferris, Maria Mariscal & Armando Medina: Improve Culture Through Employee Resource Groups

A Strong Finish- The conference concluded with closing acknowledgments. Attendees departed with actionable insights, renewed motivation, and strengthened professional connections across ACSA Region 7. Thank you to our Mini Conference planning committee for a wonderful evening!











WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Mother Lode Charter

Susan Broderick - Student, Calaveras USD
Melissa Harvey - Manager, Foster Youth Services, Calaveras COE

San Joaquin Charter

Michele Bryson - Principal, River Island Technology Academy
Maria Cordero - Administrator/V.P., Manteca USD
Kathryn Diederich - Ripon USD
Danielle Etcheverry - Special Ed Program Specialist, Tracy JUSD
Gary Flores – Coordinator IV, San Joaquin COE
Nanci Johnston – Principal, Lodi USD
Rachel Knoepfle – Banta USD
Kristin Laney - Coordinator (Data, Curriculum & Instruction), San Joaquin COE
Vanessa Martinez - San Joaquin COE, Credential Analyst
Bruce Mercado - Instructional Site Support, Program Specialist/Higher Education Instructor & Support Supervisor, Stockton USD
Taylor Mestres- Teacher, Special Assignment, Manteca USD
Cynthia Neutze – Assistant Principal, River Island Technology Academy
Illiana Plascencia – Stockton USD
Katie Turner - Recruitment & Retention Coordinator, San Joaquin COE
Nicole Vertar - Principal, Lodi USD

Stanislaus Charter

Wendy Bruce - Vice Principal, Stanislaus Union SD
Sarah Cerro - Learning Director, Ceres USD
Julia Cope - Principal, Newman-Crows Landing USD
Erin Cross - Associate Superintendent, Human Resources, Modesto City Schools
Zack Dickinson – Principal, Ceres USD
Valerie Escobar – Senior Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, Stanislaus COE
Silvia Lockheart - Admin Secretary IV, Ceres USD
Anel Lopez - MTSS Site Specialist, Turlock USD
Richard Nance – Director II of Maintenance, Modesto City Schools
Samuel Nirona – Asst. Principal, Modesto City Schools
Tiffany Sellars – School Psychologist, Ceres USD
Sonia Veredas – Principal, Waterford USD
Lamar Wallace - Director II, Career Technical Education, Stanislaus COE
Kim Winston – Riverbank USD
Sofia Zaragoza – Learning Director, Ceres USD

Tuolumne Charter

Jessica Cook - Program Specialist/Special Ed Director Sonora UHSD
Iva Fitzsimmons - Program Specialist, Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools
Echo Kayser - Twain Harte ESD, Asst. Principal/TOSA
Brittney Marlowe – CBO, Soulsbyville ESD
Flora Savage - Student Services Administrator, Sonora UHSD
Amy Smothers – Curtis Creek ESD

Meet Your Council Rep

Who: Tina Hollander
Elementary Education Council
Job: Principal, Sylvan Union School District



Job and Responsibilities: As a TK–5 principal, I foster a safe, welcoming learning environment, support teachers, and build strong partnerships with families to help every student succeed academically and socially.
Years in Education: 26 years
Why I Chose Education: Although I initially considered nursing, volunteering at a pediatric hospital confirmed my passion for working with children. I spent 17 years as a teacher, followed by three years as a vice principal and six years as a principal.
Hobbies: I love traveling, exploring historical sites, discovering unique local coffee shops, and trying restaurants with rich histories.
Spare Time: I enjoy spending time with my family exploring California, visiting coastal towns, browsing local shops, and discovering hidden gems along the way.
Education: I earned a B.A. in Liberal Studies and a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, followed by a master's degree in Educational Administration and an Administrative Services Credential from Stanislaus State University.
Something of Interest: Raised by three generations of remarkable women—my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother—I learned the importance of selflessness, empathy, and service. Their example continues to shape my commitment to supporting others and strengthening my community.

A Region 7 Thank You to Our Sponsors!

ACSA Region 7 extends a heartfelt thank you to Parallel Learning, Grand Canyon University, California Casualty, SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union, and Effective School Solutions for supporting our fall events, including charter kick-offs, General Membership Assembly, CEL Dinner, Membership Mixer, and Mini Conference. Your continued partnership and generosity help make these events successful and provide valuable opportunities for our members to connect, learn, and grow. Thank you for being valued partners of ACSA Region 7!



CEL Annual Fall Dinner

ACSA Region 7's Annual CEL Dinner at the DoubleTree in Modesto sold out in just 48 hours! Keynote speaker Phil Boyte inspired our record-breaking crowd, while ACSA State President Dr. Rene Rickard reminded everyone, "You Belong Here." From exciting raffle prizes and networking to districts bringing noisemakers, pom-poms, and incredible school spirit, the evening was filled with celebration, energy, and appreciation for our amazing classified employees! A special thank-you to Grand Canyon University for sponsoring this outstanding event! Mark your calendars for next year's CEL Dinner on October 13th at Modesto Centre Plaza/DoubleTree.







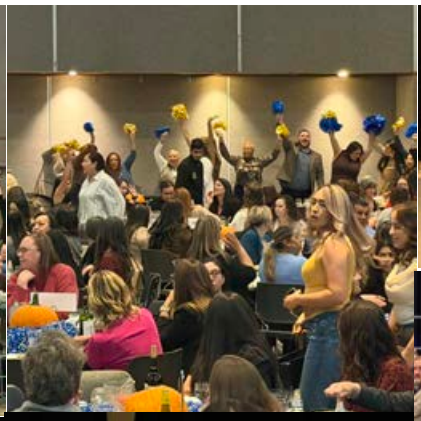


























SCHOOL CULTURE
BY DESIGN
PHIL BOYTE




Looking Ahead

November

3	RAC Luncheon Meeting 11:30 am - Spring Creek Golf Course - Ripon
4	Stanislaus Cabinet Meeting 7 am - Virtual
4-7	ACSA Leadership Summit - Chula Vista
5	Mother Lode Cabinet Meeting 7:30 am - Zoom
6	Charter PDP Plans Due to Region
10	Region 7 Conference Planning Committee Meeting - 7 am - Virtual Meeting
12	Tuolumne Charter Fall PDP - 7 am - Tuolumne County Resilience Center
	San Joaquin Board Meeting 8:15 am - Virtual
18	Stanislaus Charter PDP - 7 am - Huckleberry's - Turlock

December

1	RAC Social 11:30 am - Mary Ann Sander's Home
2	Stanislaus Cabinet Meeting 7 am - Virtual
8	Region 7 Conference Planning Committee Meeting 7 am - Virtual
10	Stanislaus Charter PDP 7 am - TBD
	San Joaquin Board Meeting 8:15 am - Virtual
12	RAC Christmas Social & Play 11 am - Mary Ann Sander's Cabin in Twain Harte

January

6	Stanislaus Cabinet Meeting 7 am Virtual
12	Tuolumne Cabinet Mtg. 7 am - Willow Wisp Cafe

SCHOOLSFIRST FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

California Casualty
Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant

Why ACSA?

ACSA provides an opportunity for ongoing collaboration, meaningful professional development, and a strong network of support among educational leaders. I value connecting with colleagues who understand the unique challenges facing education and who are committed to sharing ideas, resources, and effective practices. Most importantly, ACSA keeps the focus on student-centered results and services, providing leaders with the support and connections needed to improve outcomes and better serve all students.



Brandon Fromm
Senior Director -
Educational Options



Region 7 Officers 2026-2027

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PRESIDENT-ELECT
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COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST & FACILITIES DIRECTOR
Claudia Vicino

Charter Presidents 2026-2027

MOTHER LODE	SAN JOAQUIN	STANISLAUS	TUOLUMNE	RETIRED
Jessica Dorris	Megan Smith	Janelle DeGreek	Gabe Wingo	Barbara Magpusao