

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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More Than 50 Graduates Celebrated at Coombs Alternative Education Center Commencement Ceremony

BANNING, CA — More than 50 graduates from Banning Adult Education, Banning Independent Study School, and New Horizon High School crossed the stage on Thursday, May 28, during the Coombs Alternative Education Center Commencement Ceremony at the Banning High School Athletic Stadium. The ceremony celebrated students whose educational journeys reflect resilience, determination, and the power of perseverance.

Surrounded by family members, friends, staff, and community supporters, graduates were recognized not only for earning their diplomas, but also for overcoming personal obstacles, balancing responsibilities outside of school, recovering credits, and pursuing educational goals through alternative pathways designed to meet their unique needs.

The commencement ceremony featured remarks from student leaders, scholarship presentations, recognition of academic achievement, and the official certification and acceptance of the Class of 2026. Student speakers included Olivia Rocha of Banning Independent Study School, Valedictorian Paloma Martinez of Banning Independent Study School, Valedictorian Jasmine Verduzco of New Horizon High School, and a student representative from Banning Adult Education.

"Today is about much more than a diploma," said Dr. Melissa Lee, Principal of Coombs Alternative Education Center. "Every graduate sitting before us has a unique story. Along the way, they faced challenges, overcame obstacles, and continued moving forward with strength and courage. At Coombs, we strive to create a school community where students feel supported, respected, and empowered to succeed. Watching our graduates cross the stage tonight was a reminder that relationships, encouragement, and perseverance can change lives."

Several students received special recognition for their outstanding achievements during the ceremony.

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Jasmine Verduzco of New Horizon High School was recognized as Valedictorian, received the Riverside County Office of Education District Exceptional Graduate Academic Award, and was selected as the recipient of the Amy Herr Scholarship, which recognizes leadership and dedication to community service. Paloma Martinez of Banning Independent Study School was recognized as Valedictorian and received the Student of the Year Award for demonstrating exemplary character, leadership, and academic success.

The ceremony also included presentations of the PEO Scholarship, Daniel Cash Jr. Memorial Scholarship, Soroptimist International Banning/Beaumont Scholarship, and recognition from the Los Coyotes Band of Cahuilla and Cupeño Indians Executive Council, highlighting the strong community support surrounding students as they prepare for their next chapter.

Coombs Alternative Education Center serves students through three distinct programs designed to meet diverse educational needs. Banning Adult Education provides opportunities for adult learners to complete their high school diploma, prepare for the GED, and build career skills. New Horizon High School offers a personalized pathway to graduation for students seeking an alternative to a traditional high school setting. Banning Independent Study School provides flexible learning options through individualized instruction and independent learning opportunities. Together, these programs create pathways that help students achieve success regardless of their circumstances.

Superintendent Terrence Davis congratulates the graduates for their determination and commitment to achieving their goals.

"Every graduate we celebrated tonight has demonstrated remarkable perseverance," said Superintendent Davis. "Their paths to graduation may have looked different from those of other students, but that is what makes their accomplishments so meaningful. Through challenges, setbacks, and moments of uncertainty, they continued moving forward. Their success reminds us that perseverance, determination, and resilience can overcome obstacles and open doors to new opportunities. We are incredibly proud of the Class of 2026 and all they have achieved."

As graduates turned their tassels and accepted their diplomas, they joined a proud network of Banning Unified School District alumni prepared to pursue careers, military service, higher education, and new opportunities ahead.

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Additional Resources

View Ceremony Photos:

<https://banning-usd.smugmug.com/2025-2026/May-2026/CAE-Commencement-Ceremony>

Watch the Ceremony:

<https://youtube.com/live/mmlrhpT4Xvg?feature=share>

View the Commencement Program:

<https://canva.link/3ppql03tuk06hvx>

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About Banning Unified School District:

Banning Unified School District serves nearly 4,300 students across its schools and is one of the largest employers in the city of Banning, with over 600 dedicated staff members. The District's mission is to collaborate as a diverse community to develop responsible, respectful, and prepared students who achieve their full potential. Guided by its vision to prepare, inspire, and educate, Banning USD is committed to fostering a supportive environment where students can thrive academically and personally.

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Dr. Melissa Lee, Principal at Coombs Alternative Education welcomes students, families and staff to the 2026 Commencement Ceremony.

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Valedictorian Jasmine Verduzco of New Horizon High School delivers her speech to the Class of 2026, congratulating them on this great achievement.

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Valedictorian Paloma Martinez of Banning Independent Study School congratulates the Class of 2026 and commends their perseverance in completing the degree.

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