



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Coombs Alternative Education Center Commencement Honors the Class of 2025

BANNING, CA — The stadium lights at Banning High School Football Field illuminated more than just a ceremony on the evening of May 23, 2025—they illuminated hope, transformation, and triumph. The Coombs Alternative Education Center Commencement Ceremony honored the Class of 2025, celebrating graduates from New Horizon High School, Banning Independent Study School, and Banning Adult Education.

This was no ordinary graduation. Each cap tossed into the air represented a deeply personal story of resilience. These students came from diverse walks of life—some navigating difficult personal circumstances, others returning to education later in adulthood, and many overcoming barriers that once made graduation feel out of reach.

“This ceremony isn’t just about walking across a stage,” said Superintendent Terrence Davis. “It’s about walking through struggle, through setbacks, and into a space of possibility. Our graduates didn’t give up—and neither did the team of educators, staff, and departments who stood behind them.”

The ceremony opened with the processional to “Pomp and Circumstance”, followed by a warm welcome from Dr. Melissa Lee, Principal of Coombs Alternative Education Center. A moving Land Acknowledgment was shared by Elka Waters-Jay, a graduate of New Horizon High School. The California Cadet Corps presented the colors and led the Pledge of Allegiance, setting a tone of honor and unity.

Guests were inspired by remarks from School Board President Shelly Ruiz and Superintendent Davis, who spoke about the importance of perseverance and the District’s commitment to preparing, inspiring, and educating every student. Dr. Lee followed with the presentation of Honor Awards, recognizing students who exemplified academic excellence, character, and growth.

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Emotions ran high during the student speeches. Megan Brown, representing Banning Independent Study School, spoke of self-motivation and personal growth. Oscar Ochoa, from New Horizon High School, moved the crowd with his message of resilience and gratitude, while Ana Roque, speaking for Banning Adult Education, reflected on the courage it takes to return to school as an adult learner.

The ceremony continued with the presentation of scholarships and recognitions, including:

- Student of the Year: Oscar Ochoa
- District Exceptional Graduate: Janessa Diaz
Top Students: Amanda Betancourt and Janessa Diaz
- Seal of Biliteracy Recipients: Ian Espinoza Mendez and Eitan Tamayo Macedo

The energy peaked as Dr. Lee certified the Class of 2025, and Superintendent Davis accepted them on behalf of the Banning Unified School District. One by one, names were called during the Roll Call of Graduates, diplomas were presented by the Board of Education, and tassels were turned in unison by David Sanchez, a teacher from New Horizon.

This year, graduates wore decorated caps adorned with affirmations, names of loved ones, and powerful symbols of personal identity. Each cap told a story—of a journey that mattered. Meanwhile, the stadium stands overflowed with proud families and friends who cheered, cried, and captured memories under the night sky.

The ceremony closed with a celebratory recessional to the songs “*Moment 4 Life*” by Nicki Minaj and “*Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)*” by Green Day—reminders of both celebration and reflection.

“This isn’t just a school event—it’s a community effort,” said Dr. Lee. “It takes every department, every counselor, every support staff member, and every teacher to make this day happen. Together, we created a celebration that our students will never forget.”

With heads held high and tassels turned, the Class of 2025 ended the evening with unmistakable Stallion Pride, ready to embrace the next chapter of their lives.

View photos from the event: bit.ly/44oIvkU

View the full printed program: bit.ly/4k9EDce

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Special recognition goes to the departments that contributed behind the scenes—Student Services, Educational Services, Innovation and Technology, Maintenance & Operations, School Safety, Communications, and the full staff at Coombs Alternative Education Center—for their role in delivering a commencement that was both seamless and meaningful.

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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 500 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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(Photos have been attached)

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PHOTO CAPTION: Students proudly move their tassels from right to left signifying them as graduates of Coombs Alternative Education Center.

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PHOTO CAPTION: Students walk down Banning High School Football Field on there way to the stage for commencement.

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PHOTO CAPTION: From left to right - Dr. Tonia Causey-Bush, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, Dr. Melissa Lee, Principle of Coombs Alternative Education Center, Laura Troutnan, Board Member, Mayra Anguiano, Board Clerk, Shelly Ruiz, Board President, and Terrence Davis, Superintendent.

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