

# 2010

## every student succeeding

### a salute to public education success stories

Many students face tremendous obstacles in their lives, but through dedication, hard work and the support of caring educators, these students have learned to overcome life's hardships.

These inspiring students know about struggling and striving, about trying to fit in and feeling left out. They know about shame and anger and making mistakes. But they also know about hope and trust and second chances.

They know another untold story. It's about today's public schools and the people who make them work — dedicated professionals who help students deal with their fears and frustrations; educators who reach out to them, so they can reach higher than they ever thought possible to achieve success in school and in life.

ACSA salutes these student champions and the outstanding educators who keep the promise of a better future within every student's reach.

## Region 2

### Carlos Galvan

Carlos Galvan was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor that left him with growth hormone deficiency, bilateral hearing problems and



neurocognitive delays. But don't tell him he can't face any challenge.

In addition to maintaining a 3.8 GPA at Markham Middle School

in Placerville, Carlos is a cross country racer, a member of the school's leadership class and a Special Olympian. He is present every year to run a 24-hour relay race to help find a cure for cancer.

Carlos' family insisted he always have access to the Least Restrictive Environment. He is in special education classes for academics, but whenever possible, Carlos attends general education classes, where he is supported to be successful.

All of those who work with Carlos and his family know he is not "normal," but extraordinary. He teaches everyone that, no matter what your circumstances, how you decide to face life and deal with its challenges is up to you.

ACSA is proud to honor Carlos Galvan and his educational support team in Region 2.

## Region 3

### Huyen Vo

Huyen "Kiki" Vo came to America for medical care in 2000 after her family home in Vietnam burned, killing her mother and severely injuring her and her siblings.

Kiki endured burns over 85 percent of her body, requiring 25 surgeries to date.

Her father worked hard to maintain the family, but as the oldest child, Kiki took over the care of the household. When her father was diagnosed with cancer, the workload increased. Sadly, her father died in November 2009.

Despite those challenges, Kiki has maintained excellent grades at West Campus High in Sacramento. She is also a contributing member of her community, serving as a spokesperson for Citizens for Fire Safety and motivating other burn survivors to stay strong in the face of adversity. She has volunteered at Shriner's Hospital and was honored by the Sacramento City Council as a Youth of the Month.



Kiki now intends to fulfill her father's dream for her to go to college. ACSA is proud of Huyen "Kiki" Vo and her Region 3 support team.

## Region 4

### Jose Zepeda

Despite daily challenges, Jose Zepeda had a strong drive to succeed in his four years at Terra Linda High School. He took the most challenging AP classes while maintaining a 3.5 GPA or better. He was an active participant in AVID, served as a peer tutor and mentor, and worked with the Nicaragua Service Club.

Jose grew up in an area of San Rafael called "The Canal," where low-income housing is plentiful and gang activity thrives. Raised by a single mother, Jose managed to avoid gang entanglements and set his sights on success after high school.

His work with the after-school tutoring program helps under-achieving Latino male students find the right track to their own academic success. He has taken an interest in mechanics through the school's auto program and completed a summer internship at Firestone. His outreach through the service club helped preschool through third-graders in the poorest neighborhood of Managua.

Jose is an exceptional young man who is to be admired for his perseverance and educational achievements. ACSA salutes Jose Zepeda and his Region 4 support team.



## Region 5

### Elisha St. Denis

Kind, intelligent and strong are words that describe Elisha St. Denis. Even though her school years were often chaotic, Elisha has a clear idea of what she wants to achieve and the drive to get there.

Elisha spent her elementary years often homeless with a mother prone to mental frailty. She attended a small Christian school in the middle years, but her mother decided public high schools were full of demons and refused to enroll her. Elisha called upon her father to rescue her. While he enrolled her at Hillsdale

High in San Mateo, he quickly returned to a life of travel, leaving Elisha with friends.

No matter where she found herself, Elisha took the bus to Hillsdale, where the Smaller Learning Community concept provided personalization to help students succeed academically, socially and emotionally.

Elisha's intelligence, maturity and independence were keys to her success, particularly in her crucial role as a member of the student-run newspaper, the Hillsdale Scroll. She has turned her disadvantages into advantages and is now pursuing her goal to attend a university.

ACSA is proud to honor Elisha St. Denis and her Region 5 support team.

## Region 6

### Valeria Navarrete

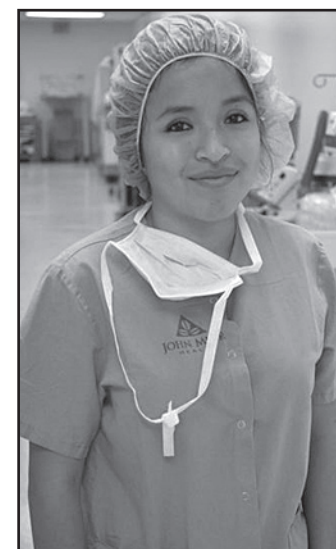
When Valeria Navarrete's biology teacher suggested she apply for a summer internship at John Muir Hospital, he probably didn't realize

that her life would change. For the first time Valeria was actively participating in her education, and her confidence soared. She started speaking up in class, no longer afraid of embarrassing herself.

This was a big transformation for the formerly shy girl, who has to do the household cleaning, laundry, cooking and homework duty for a younger brother and sister. Her single mother's illness prevents her from assuming these duties, and she is often unable to work at her factory job. Valeria was able to work full time at the hospital over the summer, and was the only intern asked to continue on during the school year. But because she has to help out at home, Valeria had to say no.

Despite challenges her speech therapist and IEP caseworker are addressing, Valeria is striving to be the best person possible, and hopes to pursue a medical career.

ACSA salutes Valeria Navarrete and her Region 6 support team.





## Region 7

### Sean Ritter

A few years after Sean Ritter's father passed away, his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her treatment was going well and she was expected to recover when her condition suddenly worsened. When Sean was in ninth grade his mother passed away, and Sean had to move in with a friend, since his older

brother was away at college.

Sean's attendance at Summerville High School was excellent, and he was enrolled in college prep classes. Then, the mother of his new family was stricken with cancer and passed away. Sean was forced to move out of state to live with relatives.

Finally, at the start of his senior year, Sean was reunited with his brother and moved back to Summerville, where he has become a confident and mature young man. At the urging of a teacher, Sean joined Future Business Leaders of America and participated in regional and state competitions. He plans to eventually attend Columbia College and study business.

ACSA is proud of Sean Ritter and his Region 7 support team.

## Region 8

### Jessica Ybarra

Pregnant at the age of 15, Jessica Ybarra knew her life would never again be her own. Then she learned she would be having twins. In 2008, after the premature babies left ICU, Jessica became a student at Foothill High. She joined the school's Family Learning Center, where teen parents can get support.

Jessica has accepted the responsibility of raising her two children. During breaks and lunch periods Jessica makes sure the babies are changed and fed, then she gets to class on time. She has learned how to organize her day to ensure she is a great student and committed parent, thanks to help from Foothill's counseling team and its Student Success Center.

Jessica also has a part-time job and often takes care of her younger sister because their mother lives out of state. Still, she stayed on track to graduate. Her goal is to become a nurse or to study psychology, and eventually attend San Jose State University.

ACSA is proud to recognize Jessica Ybarra and her Region 8 support team.

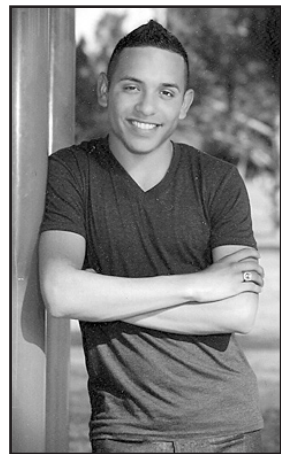


## Region 9

### Joseph Blancas

Joseph Blancas is a young man with a strong sense of what it takes to make his way through the obstacles life can bring. When he was three his drug-addicted mother left the family. Joseph grew up in a neighborhood where gangs were recruiting young people every day, yet he resisted.

Joseph applied for Sunnyside High School's AVID Program and was the top candidate. He was devastated when his father, his most devoted advocate and his best friend, died of a heart



attack. His grandparents took him in, but because they were not able to navigate the school system, Joseph has been self-reliant. He ranked No. 1 in his class, took Advanced Placement classes, and served as senior class president.

He is enthusiastic, creative, and has an unbeatable work ethic. Joseph says he wants to continue to make his dad proud of him. Sunnyside High School staff and students are moved by the way Joseph contributed to a positive school culture.

ACSA proudly honors Joseph Blancas and his Region 9 support team.

## Region 10

### David Moreno



Despite severe speech impediment and cognitive challenges, David Moreno is eager to learn as much as possible and communicate with others. He has excellent rapport with staff at Everett Alvarez High School, where he always exhibits a positive and respectful attitude.

David works hard to complete his school assignments, taking home what he can't complete in class. David's parents instilled in him a drive to succeed, and he understands that earning good grades is the key that will open many doors of opportunity. Always willing to help, David volunteers at school and even helped out during the ACSA Every Child Counts Symposium in Monterey last January.

David has a contagious sense of humor and a willingness to help newcomers to the school. This high school football player also coaches a campus Powder Puff team. One of his favorite teachers says, "David has taught me to laugh more at myself. By watching his tolerance with others, I have learned to be more patient."

ACSA is proud to recognize David Moreno and his Region 10 support team.

## Region 11

### Tyler Soria

Despite the challenges he faced in his home life, Tyler Soria recently graduated as a top student from Golden West High School in Visalia.

Tyler wasn't always a top student. Growing up, his mother struggled with addiction and eventually lost her job. In and out of rehab, his mother couldn't care for him and he went to live with his aunt and uncle. Up to then, he had missed a lot of school, had very low grades and began hanging around with the wrong crowd.

Living with his aunt and uncle, Ty viewed his new life as a second chance. Determination and a positive attitude eventually took over, and he began to turn his life around. He became involved with the drama program, allowing him to feel more connected to school.

He soon realized he could be successful if he set his mind to it, and enrolled in classes at the community college to further his education. He is extremely self-motivated and was able to maintain a 3.67 grade point average in high school.

ACSA is proud of Tyler Soria and his support team from Region 11.



## Region 12

### Sarai Napp

At the age of 15, Sarai Napp moved to California with her siblings with nothing more than a few bags of clothes. Staying in a shelter, she was grateful just to have a roof over her head. She soon moved to a studio apartment, sharing the small space with 15 family members. She had

to sit in the hallway of the apartment building just to be able to study.

She moved frequently throughout high school, and after her grandfather died, she sank into depression. Her grades slipped and she missed much of her sophomore year. When the time came to take the California High School Exit Exam, she failed the English portion of the exam twice.

Sarai realized in order to succeed in life, she had to turn things around. She started taking her studies at San Bernardino High School seriously. She enrolled in summer school and after-school tutoring. She became more focused, even volunteering and helping her disabled mother. She was able to keep her grade point average at 3.0, and was selected to visit the University of New Mexico and stay on campus for two weeks.

ACSA is proud of Sarai Napp and the Region 12 support team that helped her succeed.

## Region 13

### Christian Tirado

Born in Mexico, Christian Tirado came to the United States after his mother left the family and his father was jailed. Never having attended school, Christian was

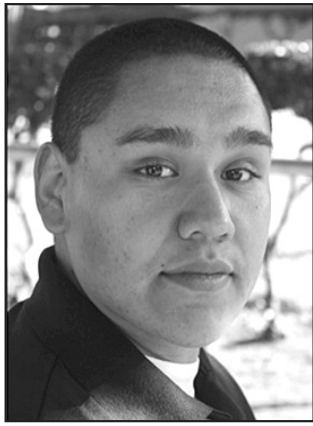


ill-prepared and undisciplined when he came to Larsen Elementary School in the Hueneme Elementary School District halfway through second grade. He would hit other students and was physically and verbally defiant with authority figures. Even at 7 years old, he knew no letters, numbers or basic kindergarten concepts.

His teachers were patient with him, building not only his academic knowledge but also his self-esteem. It took months, but his demeanor changed and his behavior problems stopped. He became motivated and is a quick learner.

Christian has made friends and is respectful and happy. He speaks English well and is well on his way to reading and writing it fluently. Being a non-reader only two years ago, he was reading almost at grade level by the fourth grade. His teachers have even referred him to the GATE program.

ACSA is proud to recognize Christian Tirado and his Region 13 support team.



## Region 14 Raul Tinoco

In the sixth grade, Raul Tinoco was a troubled middle school student. With an absentee father and his mother working long hours to support the family, he was drawn into the gang life. He

spent his days smoking, drinking and engaging in gang activities. His life was on the path to self-destruction.

When he was 14, he was walking down the street with a fellow gang member when a car pulled up and shots rang out. His friend was hit and died in Raul's arms.

It was then that Raul decided to turn things around. It took several years, but with the support of his teachers in Long Beach USD, he learned to work hard at his academics and improve his behavior. He got involved in Jordan High School's Male Academy, which provides one-on-one counselors who help coordinate support services and monitor grades and attendance for boys considered to be at-risk.

Raul's grades improved and he hopes to join the military and pursue a career in law enforcement, with the ultimate goal of helping kids like himself who need support.

ACSA proudly honors Raul Tinoco and the Region 14 support team who helped him succeed.

## Region 15

### Briana Ferron

Rarely do students make as dramatic a turnaround in their grades as Briana Ferron, a recent

graduate of La Serna High School in Whittier. At the end of her freshman year, Briana had a 0.69 grade point average. By her senior year, she

raised it to 3.8.

Briana's major challenge in academic success was due to something many students face: fear of failure and apathy. Because she didn't believe she could succeed, she became disconnected from school and found safety in failure.

Due to her poor grades, she was placed in La Serna's Organized Academic Support In School program. She drew strength from her assigned mentor, a senior who encouraged her to take risks and believe in herself. She began to develop a more positive self-image and her grades steadily began to improve.

Her hard work extended beyond the classroom. She was a member of the tennis and swim teams, and later was selected as a representative to the Associated Student Body. She even returned to the OASIS program as an academic mentor to help other struggling students.

ACSA salutes Briana Ferron and the Region 15 team who supported her.



## Region 16

### Aina Mulleda

When Aina Mulleda was 5 years old, her mother left her in the Philippines to go to the United States and earn enough money to give her hearing-impaired daughter an opportunity for success. But sadly, Aina's mother died before she could see her daughter again.

Aina was then adopted by her



uncle, who encouraged her in her studies. She now has the attitude that she wants to work hard in school, so "when I finally get to where I want to be, I can look back and say that I have worked hard enough to earn all the things that I have."

Despite being deaf, Aina was mainstreamed into regular classes in middle school. She has many deaf and non-deaf friends at school. Her hearing friends asked Aina's sign language interpreter to teach them some signs so they could communicate with her that way. Her ultimate goal after she finishes school is to open a restaurant with an all-deaf staff. This is a girl who is certain to keep on inspiring others as she goes on to find success in school and in life.

ACSA is pleased to honor Aina Mulleda and her Region 16 support team.

## Region 17

### Sarah Brazer

Born legally blind, Sara Brazer hasn't allowed her lack of sight to slow her down one bit. In her first three years of high school, Sarah had a fulltime instructional aide to assist her in navigating the campus and accessing the curriculum through adaptive devices and Braille.

But entering her senior year, Sarah decided she wanted to become totally independent. Although her IEP team tried to talk her into some transitional services, Sarah refused, saying she wanted to be ready for college and the world at large.

She learned how to use a guide dog and checked out her textbooks in the summer to get a jump-start on the year. She insisted on all mainstream classes, including an AP English class.

To say she was successful is an understatement. She no longer requires an instructional aide; she completed all her classes with a 3.3 GPA and passed the High School Exit Exam. She even found time to participate in choir and a school drama production. She has given talks in classes about her experiences, and her dog, Forman, became the unofficial second school mascot.

ACSA proudly salutes Sarah Brazer and her Region 17 support team.



## Region 18

### Matt Abrams

Matt Abrams personifies the Every Student Succeeding program. His mother passed away when Matt was only 11. His father distanced himself as a way of coping with the loss, so Matt took on a great deal of responsibility for supporting his autistic twin sister.

Matt didn't let hardships drag him down. Instead, he has shined through the struggles. He was a senior honors student at Patrick Henry High School, graduating with a

4.83 GPA in all honors and AP classes. He was the valedictorian in his class of 500 students.

Through all this he helped his sister cope with her autism by never giving up on her. His work with her has given him a great passion to help others less fortunate than he. This makes his career goal of becoming a surgeon very fitting. He earned early admission to Stanford University to help him on the way.

Matt's story is one of overcoming challenges through hard work and determination, while maintaining a strongly optimistic outlook on life. ACSA is proud to recognize Matt Abrams and his Region 18 support team.



## Region 19

### Nayeli Osuna-Alvarez

When Nayeli Osuna-Alvarez arrived at Amistad High School she was behind in credits, admittedly by her own lack of effort. Catching up became very challenging when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and Nayeli, as the eldest of six children, had to care for her younger siblings, among them a 1-year-old.

After her mother's diagnosis, her uncle, who had been living with the family, passed away from a diabetic stroke. Meanwhile Nayeli also had to help look after her father, also a diabetic. After Nayeli's junior year, her mother passed away.

Nayeli saw how hard her father worked every day, and how his lack of education hindered his work options, so she vowed to finish high school and go on to become a registered nurse.

Even though during her senior year her father was hospitalized with a serious unknown condition before finally recovering, Nayeli kept at her schoolwork, maintaining a grade point average of nearly 3.9. She graduated from Amistad High and is now attending the College of the Desert.

ACSA is pleased to honor Nayeli Osuna-Alvarez and her Region 19 support team.



# The mission of ACSA

is to ensure that all students have the essential skills and knowledge needed to excel. On every school day throughout California, dedicated educators and courageous students overcome tremendous obstacles to reach that goal. Their success is our success; their powerful stories are our inspiration.

ACSA's Every Student Succeeding program honors students who exceed our expectations and the educators who support them along the way. We are proud to highlight these young men and women who have overcome great obstacles to succeed. They face life's challenges head on. Their stories are remarkable and their futures are bright.

2010  
every  
**student**  
succeeding  
a salute to public  
education success stories

thank you!

**MetLife** Resources  
for your sponsorship  
of ACSA's Every Student Succeeding  
Recognition Program

MOVING OUR MISSION FORWARD ♦ ACSA'S 2010 LEADERSHIP SUMMIT  
NOVEMBER 4-6 ♦ MANCHESTER GRAND HYATT, SAN DIEGO