

2009

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 1 Israel Garcia

Israel Garcia is a model for why alternative education exists. He was overcome by adversity and headed for a life of crime before entering a group home in Susanville and attending the Community Day School in Lassen Union High School District.

With the help of a nurturing but disciplined environment provided by Charlotte Klinock at CDS, and supported by his new guardian, Israel began to realize consistent achievement. That success allowed him to transfer to Credence High, the district's continuation school, from which he graduated June 20. Only a few credits prevented him from graduating at Lassen High.

Alternative Education Principal Brett Mitchell said the team approach to keeping students involved in education led to Israel's recovery and success at CDS. That allowed him to thrive in the less invasive environment of Credence. Israel's success earned him more and more freedom, until he eventually enjoyed the absolute trust of his teachers and administrators.

ACSA congratulates Israel Garcia and the Region 1 support team that selected him for this award.

Region 2 Cristina Mora

Christina Mora has never dodged a challenge. Her incredible drive took her from her migrant roots to the head of her class at Williams High School in Williams USD. As a native Spanish speaker, Cristina embraced the English language, even winning speech contests conducted by local service clubs.

Christina took every significant course offered at Williams High and demonstrated a vast amount of leadership potential, serving as student body president in her senior year. She arrived early every day for zero period and was often the last student to leave campus. Christina also participated in many extracurricular activities, including girls' basketball, California Federation of Student Governments, Upward Bound, and on the county's winning Academic Decathlon team.

She reached No. 1 status in her senior class. All this while taking a full schedule of Advanced



Placement classes, as well as community college courses in the evenings to realize graduation in May. She plans to major in political science with a focus on economics at Stanford.

ACSA is proud of Christina Mora and the Region 2 support team that selected her for this award.

Region 3 Hiep Ma

Hiep Ma was born in Vietnam and abandoned by his parents as an infant. He was raised in poverty by his grandmother and haunted by the question of why his mother left him.

At 15, Hiep's mother, who had remarried, came back into his life. She took him to America, where he worked hard to learn English, get good grades, do his chores and help the family. Unfortunately his new stepfather did not want him in the home. Hiep said his dreams and hopes were broken.

Then an aunt in Sacramento offered him a place to stay and his life began to turn around at Cordova High School in Folsom-Cordova USD. He learned fluent English and earned very high grades. The school staff became like a family. Principal Jackie Levy said, "Hiep represents the promise America's public education system offers: that everyone who works hard can share in the American dream."

Hiep graduated in May and looks forward to attending American River College and earning his AA degree.

ACSA salutes Hiep Ma and the Region 3 support team who selected him for this honor.

Region 4 Brian Pilat

Despite profound physical limitations, Brian Pilat's future is bright. He is excited to move into the world of work, following his K-12 career in the Middletown School District, from which he graduated in May.

In his kindergarten year, Brian was run over by a pickup truck backing out of a driveway. He suffered traumatic brain injuries and injuries to his legs and pelvis. In addition, his optic nerve was damaged, leaving him legally blind.



When he returned to school, Brian was included in regular classroom study, but had to learn to read and write in Braille, use an abacus and employ screen readers for his computer. His school day was extended to allow for mobility training to learn techniques to participate in activities his peers took for granted.

The team of teachers and administrators at Middletown helped him complete his requirements and become an accomplished young man. He will now attend California School for the Blind to gain additional skills for his journey in life.

ACSA applauds Brian Pilat and the Region 4 support team that selected him for this award.

Region 5 Kevin Rodriguez

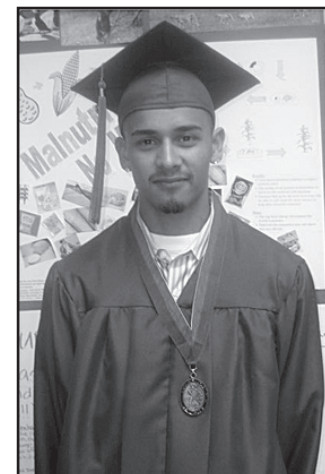
Hillsdale High in San Mateo Union High School District played an important role in Kevin Rodriguez' success. But his own self-esteem and desire to succeed led him to make significant changes in his educational and life paths.

Kevin was just another face in the crowd, jumping from school to school and floating under the radar. His education was minimal until he joined the smaller learning communities at Hillsdale. He was able to really connect with teachers, advisors, counselors and other students in a way that dramatically resulted in a dedication to learning.

Soccer was also a contributing factor to Kevin's success. His position on the school team gave him a sense of community he had not experienced before. His team pride and school pride transformed his attitude.

Following a fifth-year granted by the Hillsdale administration because of Kevin's improvements in efforts and ability, Kevin graduated in May.

ACSA congratulates Kevin Rodriguez and the Region 5 support team that selected him for this award.





Region 6 Rasjeon Hines

Rasjeon Hines attended seven different schools before he finally planted roots at Antioch High. His transient lifestyle had led to altercations in and out of school. A budding football and

track athlete, he'd been kicked off several teams for various violations.

But entering the REACH program in middle school began the long process of transformation to becoming a strong academic student, maintaining a 3.0 GPA and graduation last May. Rasjeon became an employee for REACH, working in a project called Youth for a Positive Change.

Rasjeon was a positive role model on campus, following school rules and being respectful to everyone. He worked on a video encouraging students to take the California Standards Test seriously, and he coached Antioch High's powder-puff football team. Rasjeon was accepted at several University of California schools based on academics alone, with the possibility of receiving football scholarships still in the offing. He has turned his life around and now gives back to his community.

ACSA salutes Rasjeon Hines and the Region 6 support team that selected him for this award.

Region 7

Ashley Ann Anderson

Imagine having to get through high school while suffering immense back pain that numerous surgeries had not alleviated. Ashley Ann Anderson faced exactly this challenge.

Because of the pain, her attendance at Sonora High School was sporadic. Often she would leave the house in the morning, only to climb back through her bedroom window – her pain so bad, she just wanted to sleep.

Ashley faced other challenges too. Her parents suffered drug and alcohol problems, from which they are recovering. Fortunately, Ashley always had her older brother and sister to help get her to doctor appointments and hospital tests.

Ashley's attendance improved greatly during her junior and senior years, but she still found herself 35 credits short of graduation. She made the commitment to return for another semester; passed all the classes she needed, while working two jobs, and ultimately passed the California High School Exit Exam. She graduated last December, and is awaiting what she hopes will be her final surgery to end the pain.

ACSA is proud to honor Ashley Ann Anderson and her Region 7 support team.

Region 8

Itzy Gomez

Itzy Gomez is a humongous spirit housed in a tiny body at Glider Elementary in Oak Grove School District. She has endured surgeries to correct two clubfeet and wears braces on both legs. Surgery to remove a tumor from her lower back led to impairment of her bladder.

When she was very young, Itzy witnessed her mother's murder, and still suffers from post-traumatic stress. Her father was incarcerated for being an accomplice to the murder, and she is being raised by her maternal grandmother.

In addition, Itzy faces English learner barriers, and is much smaller than her classmates. But none of this has squelched her unsinkable spirit. As part of her adaptive physical education, Itzy



coaxed a teacher into allowing a friend to join her in zooming around campus on tricycles, which strengthened Itzy's legs.

Her teachers are constantly amazed at the way she pushes herself beyond all physical and academic expectations. Her health care providers, the school staff and all of her fellow students love her upbeat presence, her independence and her incredibly huge smile.

ACSA is honored to recognize the accomplishments of Itzy Gomez and the Region 8 support team that nominated her for this award.



Region 9

Atticus Villanueva

His nominators call Atticus Villanueva a "miracle child." In 2005, while at daycare, Atticus was run over by a truck. He spent the next few months in a hospital fighting for his life.

The accident caused severe brain damage, leaving him almost completely blind in his left eye, almost completely deaf in his left ear, and unable to walk or talk. Doctors gave him a 16 percent chance of surviving, with the very real likelihood that if he survived he would be in a permanently vegetative state.

Yet, thanks to the strong support of his parents and medical team – and a heartily perseverant spirit – Atticus has progressed from using a wheelchair, to a walker, to a harness. As an active, motivated and determined first grader at Shaffer Elementary in Atwater ESD, he earned his classmates' love and admiration.

Atticus' mother volunteers daily in the classroom, working with him and all of his classmates. He is visited twice daily by the school nurse who administers medication and hugs. Away from school, Atticus has twice-weekly physical therapy sessions and maintains close friendships and family ties.

ACSA is proud to honor Atticus Villanueva and his Region 9 support team.

Region 10

Jannet Rojas-Rodriguez

Passing the California High School Exit Exam is stressful for any student. But it is even more stressful when you're taking it two days before you deliver a baby.

Jannet Rojas-Rodriguez faced that situation. But she faced it with the same aplomb with which she faced her learning disability and language barrier. Her nominators say her perseverance in facing these challenges and in coming to school every day during her pregnancy led to her becoming a role model to her fellow students in the Monterey Adult School/ROP Special Education Transitions class for 18 to 22 year olds.

Jannet became pregnant at age 17 and gave birth at 18. Aside from the challenges of being a new mother, spelling and reading had always been difficult for Jannet, as English is her second language. Through the assistance she received in her Transitions Class, she was able to greatly improve her English reading and writing skills. She graduated in June, and Jannet now has her sights set on becoming a registered nurse.

ACSA is proud to recognize Jannet Rojas-Rodriguez and the Region 10 support team that selected her for this award.



Region 11 Erasto Vega

Erasto Vega, a graduate of Exeter High School, is proof that with sheer determination, anything is possible. A child of immigrant farm workers, Erasto did not learn English until elementary school. In fifth grade, he was placed in a

reading group where he read the simpler, less interesting books. At that point, he became determined to learn English, and over the summer read as many books in English as he could. His efforts paid off, and by the sixth grade he moved up to the higher-level reading group.

Erasto also excels at math, and his test scores placed him in the top 3 percent of his grade. He has taken on the most demanding courses, and was one of the top-ranked students in his senior class. He also played on the high school soccer team, cross-country team and is active in the California Scholarship Federation. He plans to major in chemical engineering at UCLA or CSU Long Beach.

ACSA applauds Erasto Vega and the Region 11 support team that selected him for this award.

Region 12

Adrianna Castillo

A student at Dave Stine Chaffey West County Community Day School in San Bernardino County, Adrianna Castillo has turned her life around. As a pregnant minor, she didn't take school seriously. A former teacher described her as being "passive-aggressive" with her schooling, since rather than objecting to assignments, she would simply ignore them. When the opportunity arose to leave community day school, she would not complete the work.

But over the two years she attended Dave Stine Chaffey West County CDS, Adrianna became more mature and began to take school seriously. When attending cosmetology classes, she realized she would like to own her own business. She soon became on pace to graduate. Not only did she return to her school district, but she returned ahead in credits. She worked to improve her writing skills, which helped her pass the High School Exit Exam. She has also improved her attendance, and has had perfect attendance for the last two quarters.

ACSA congratulates Adrianna Castillo and the Region 12 support team that selected her for this award.

Region 13

Kelley Burdett

School can be hard enough, but when students face serious trauma in their lives, it can seem nearly impossible to succeed. Kelley Burdett, a graduate of Paso Robles High School, overcame her childhood tragedies to not only succeed, but excel in school.

When Kelley was three months old, her father, an Air Force helicopter pilot, died in a helicopter crash. Then, in 2002, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Three years later, despite numerous surgeries, medication and chemo, her mother died.

But Kelley didn't let the tragedies dissuade her from achieving. Rather, she turned the hardships into positive energy. She became involved in sports and other school activities. She played volleyball,



track and field, was vice president of her class, and a member of the California Scholarship Federation, as well as a girls' Christian club, the surfing club and the student athletic trainers – all while maintaining a 4.25 grade point average. She completed an internship at the local hospital and plans to pursue a career in the medical field.

ACSA is proud of Kelley Burdett and thanks the Region 13 team that nominated her for this award.

Region 14

Ritesh Desai

Ritesh Desai, a June graduate of Cerritos High School in the ABC Unified School District, has proven that any student can succeed, despite physical handicaps that may, at first glance, hold them back.

Ritesh entered high school with a stuttering problem. When faced with the need to communicate orally, he reacted with avoidance and excuses. But during the course of his freshman year, his shell gradually began to break away, revealing an intelligent and confident young man and a skilled communicator. Recently, he stood and delivered a flawless wedding toast in honor of his culture.

His transformation began with participation in the Model United Nations Program. Through encouragement and tutoring, he excelled not only in academics, but in athletics and extracurricular activities. He maintained three Advanced Placement classes, participated in track and field, and became involved in community volunteering. He also worked as a math and science tutor and hopes to pursue a career in mechanical engineering and civil and environmental engineering.

ACSA is proud to honor Ritesh Desai and his Region 14 support team.



Region 15

Brittany Zahnle

Brittany Zahnle, a seventh grader at Rio Norte Junior High School in the William S. Hart School District, has faced many physical struggles over the course of her life.

When she was a toddler, she was

diagnosed with a brain tumor that caused her to lose sight in her right eye. Radiation and chemotherapy caused her pituitary gland to malfunction, leaving her body unable to regulate itself. In fifth grade, she slipped into a coma for several weeks.

As a special day class student at Bridgeport Elementary, Brittany was fearful of school and did not associate with other students. Her parents attended class with her every day and assisted her with her assignments. But she soon turned herself around to become a flourishing middle school student who enjoys conversing with others and attends class on her own. She was later placed in a general education setting, and has shown that perseverance and hard work can lead to success despite any challenge.

ACSA congratulates Brittany Zahnle and the Region 15 support team that nominated her for this award.

Region 16

Victor Kwon

Victor Kwon was born in Argentina. But when he was 7 years old his family moved to Korea, and Victor had to learn to read and write a new language. Eight years later the family moved to Mexico, and then to Los Angeles, where Victor enrolled in Los Angeles High School.

He was fluent enough in English to enroll in ESL-3 in his first year as an 11th grade student. He has been a very ambitious student,



enrolling in the required A-G core curriculum and several Advanced Placement courses.

Victor realizes that it takes more than coursework to make a successful student. He joined the varsity swim team and water polo team, and started an after-school math tutoring program for struggling ESL students.

Victor is a generous student who realizes it is important for all students to succeed, regardless of their primary language. He has put in the time and taken on the responsibility of organizing the peer tutoring program, modeling success and achievement for all students. He is an inspiration to everyone at Los Angeles High School. ACSA is proud to honor Victor Kwon and his Region 16 support team.

Region 17

Kizzie Knowles



Kizzie Knowles has known many personal losses, but has never lost sight of her

goals. As an infant, Kizzie was placed in a foster home with a stable, loving family that became her own. She visited her biological mom every other weekend, but sadly, her mom died when Kizzie was in fifth grade. Then, in November 2008 Kizzie's foster dad, whom she considered her best friend, passed away after an illness.

Despite being identified with a learning disability, Kizzie tried her best in school. Recognized by her teachers at Warner Middle School in Westminster School District as being a hard-working, dedicated student, Kizzie now excels at softball, playing catcher and alternate pitcher. Kizzie participates in a weekly community program called "GirlPower," and was recognized by the Boys and Girls Club for her leadership skills as a camp counselor.

In spite of the challenges Kizzie has faced, she dreams of attending Arizona State University, continuing with softball and eventually obtaining a medical degree.

ACSA is proud of Kizzie Knowles and thanks the Region 17 team that nominated her for this award.

Region 18

Madina Hakimzada

Madina Hakimzada was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, where her father was killed by the Taliban

when she was just 1 1/2 years old. Madina's mother and siblings came to the United States

with the help of the International Rescue Community and settled in El Cajon.

Madina's support team at Foster Elementary School in San Diego USD has seen her self confidence and independence grow under their guidance. She has become an articulate student who works cooperatively with staff and fellow students.

Madina has taken on many leadership roles at school and in the community. She reads as a "book buddy" to kindergarten kids, is a member of the school's safety patrol team and is a games leader during recess. She was elected student body president in 2008, mayor of BizTown for Junior Achievement and honored by the Kiwanis Club with the Principal's Award.

Madina's wonderful sense of humor makes her a delight to be around. Watching her interact with her peers offers her support team hope for the youth of tomorrow.

ACSA congratulates Madina Hakimzada and the Region 18 support team that selected her for this award.



Region 19

Frankie Quintana

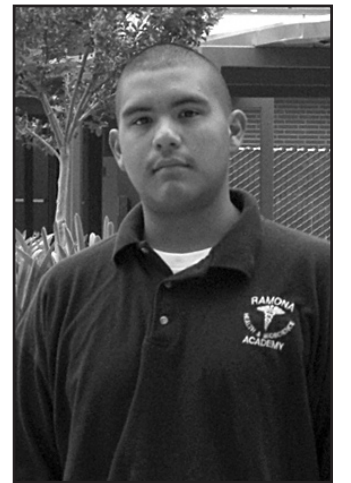
When Frankie Quintana started at Ramona High School in Riverside USD, he was involved in gangs and had a negative attitude about school. But he soon decided he wanted to become a serious student and responsible community member.

Frankie's life turned around when he applied for the Health and Bioscience Academy and the ROTC programs and was accepted at each.

Frankie cut his gang ties, even though it meant telling loved ones who were involved in gang activities that he no longer wanted to participate.

Frankie has risen through the ranks to become commanding officer of his ROTC unit, where he serves as a role model and mentor to all cadets. He exhibits natural leadership abilities and organizational skills and has become an effective and inspirational leader. Frankie has also served as treasurer and vice president of the Health and Bioscience Academy, and participated in job shadowing opportunities at the local hospital.

ACSA salutes Frankie Quintana's strength and self-reliance, and acknowledges the efforts of his 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.

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