

NEWS RELEASE

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**First Opportunity Youth Academy student graduates
from SCCOE's newest Alternative Education program**

SAN JOSE, CA – Growing up, 25-year-old Alejandro Patino had a hard time studying and staying focused. There were a lot of distractions and negative influences in school, and Patino didn't find the support he needed at home. Patino reflected on his past before moving forward during the Santa Clara County Office of Education's Alternative Education Department (AED) Graduation on Tuesday.



County Superintendent of Schools Jon R. Gundry hands Alejandro Patino his diploma at the Alternative Education Department Graduation on Tuesday.

"I'm looking forward to the ceremony," he said last week. "I never thought I would graduate. I've been through so much."

Tuesday evening, Patino received his diploma as the first of 13 students to complete [Opportunity Youth Academy](#) (OYA), among 70 total students honored from AED. Launched in November 2015, OYA is a high school diploma completion opportunity for 16- to 24-year-olds which focuses on paths to college or career training.

"OYA's flexible scheduling, teacher support, and, most importantly, Alejandro's perseverance allowed him to achieve his goal and graduate high school," said Kevin Jacks, Principal for OYA San Jose at the Washington United Youth Center.

Patino enrolled in OYA on January 26, at the age of 24, to complete the 15 credits needed to receive his diploma. To make ends meet and support his family, including his 4-year-old son and his partner with a baby on the way, he maintained a full-time job at Pick-n-Pull in San Jose, often working overtime. He would come to OYA after work to complete the credits necessary to become a high school graduate. Patino officially completed the program at the end of March.

Teacher Yolanda Tapia said she was impressed with Patino's dedication to OYA.

“He amazed me from the beginning because he would actually do work from home when he wasn’t able to come in or even in addition to coming in the afternoon after work,” Tapia said, explaining she often received assignments time-stamped late into the night. “So that is a trait that I really admired.”

Tapia said Tuesday’s graduation was not just an accomplishment for the OYA students, but a tremendous day for her as a teacher.

“It is truly amazing to see a different group of students like Alejandro feel that sense of success,” she said. “Knowing the background that he has and the experiences that he went through makes it even more significant. But now he can tell his children that graduation is possible, and he has planted a seed.”

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