



BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bonita High Culinary Program Seeks New Levels of Achievement, Innovation in 2026-27 School Year

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – With a new school year underway, Bonita High School's ProStart culinary program continues to grow by leaps and bounds, inspiring a new generation of student chefs and hospitality workers. Since becoming Bonita Unified's first-ever California ProStart Cup champion in 2024 and competing nationally, Bonita High's culinary students have maintained a high level of achievement and innovation.

Bonita High's culinary success continued over the summer at the California Restaurant Foundation's annual Culinary Clash in Orange County, an event that pairs restaurant leaders with ProStart student sous chefs for a two-month mentorship experience, with the creations brought to life at a high-energy tasting event.

"Culinary Clash has become a tradition for Bonita's ProStart students. It's a great opportunity for our kids to network and learn," Bonita High ProStart culinary teacher Laurie Brandler said. "They are eager learners who have lots of confidence in themselves. When they're paired with professional chefs, their creativity goes into overdrive. It's beautiful to see."

At this year's Culinary Clash, Bonita senior Abby Brandler, the daughter of Laurie Brandler and San Dimas High ProStart culinary teacher Nick Brandler, was paired with mentor chefs from Specialty Restaurants' Castaway in Burbank. Brandler and her team created the Bangin' Iberico Pibb Bao, a marinated pork belly sandwich placed on a soft bao bun, which won two awards: the Golden Plate and Fan Favorite.

"Working with my Specialty mentors and the Castaway staff was a wonderful experience," Abby Brandler said. "At first, I felt a little intimidated, especially in the kitchen. Communication is the key. Once I got to know the staff and found my footing, we came together as a team. It was exciting. They wanted to hear my ideas and they helped me demo the sandwich. By the time we got to Culinary Clash, we knew we had a winner."

MORE



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The Culinary Clash gave the Bonita Unified participants, which included Brandler and San Dimas High ProStart students Alexa Aguilera and Gabriella Carranza, the opportunity to rub elbows with star chefs and restaurant owners from across the Southland. After the nerve-wracking competition was completed, the students were able to relax and mingle with guests while waiting for the awards presentation.

“Culinary Clash is so fun. Everybody is bringing their A-game,” Abby Brandler said. “You learn things from your mentors, then you see what everyone else has been cooking up. Everybody cheers you on and you meet people who can help you begin a career in the hospitality field. It’s an amazing networking experience.”

Growing up, Brandler wasn’t initially interested in following in her parent’s footsteps, as she discovered a love for theater and improv comedy. When she came to Bonita, Brandler realized that she could combine all her talents, using her creativity in the kitchen to come up with an inspired dish, and her public-speaking and writing skills to sell it.

“In my younger years, I wasn’t sure I wanted to be like my parents, but I’m really glad I entered the ProStart program,” Abby Brandler said. “My parents are very proud of me but understand that I want to make my own path. They are always there to help me, but also know when to step back and let me succeed or fail on my own.”

PHOTOS:

BUSD_CULINARYCLASH_2026_1: Bonita High School senior Abby Brandler (center) celebrates with San Dimas High senior Alexa Aguilera (center right) during the California Restaurant Foundation’s (CRF) annual Culinary Clash. Working with a CRF mentor, Brandler won two awards: the Golden Plate Award and the Fan Favorite Award.

BUSD_CULINARYCLASH_2026_2: Bonita Unified ProStart culinary students celebrate during the California Restaurant Foundation’s (CRF) annual Culinary Clash. Working with CRF mentors, the students won several awards. From left to right: San Dimas High junior Gabriella Carranza, Bonita High senior Abby Brandler, San Dimas High senior Alexa Aguilera, and San Dimas High Class of 2026 graduate Julian Rozier.

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