



# Educational Assistance Center

THE ADVOCATE: A Newsletter Devoted to Disability Equity



## TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

### APRIL IS AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH

The Autism Society of America celebrates Autism Acceptance Month in April. The event recognizes that Autism is more than a diagnosis, but is an identity, a community, and a lived experience that encompasses both challenges and triumphs. Throughout Autism Acceptance Month, organizations worldwide engage in community through awareness events, educational resources, and advocacy initiatives that uplift Autistic voices and create pathways for neurodiversity inclusion.

Autism is understood as a spectrum, meaning individuals exhibit a wide range of characteristics, strengths, and challenges related to social communication, behavior, and interests. It's not a one-size-fits-all condition, and individuals can have varying levels of support needs and abilities. Previously, the spectrum was thought of as a straight line, but now it's understood as a diverse, multidimensional range of individuals with varying combinations of characteristics.

### WHAT IS THE AUTISM SPECTRUM?

**DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION OR SUGGESTION FOR NEXT MONTH?**

Contact Heather Molloy at [heather\\_molloy1@vcccd.edu](mailto:heather_molloy1@vcccd.edu)

# OXNARD COLLEGE EAC STUDENT AMONG NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP SEMIFINALISTS

2

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation announced today that Ashley Porter of Oxnard College is among the semifinalists for its highly competitive [Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship](#). This scholarship aims to help community college students who have demonstrated exceptional academic ability, leadership, and service transfer to top four-year institutions and avoid student debt. The award, which is last dollar funding after all institutional aid, can provide as much as \$55,000 per year for two to three years to complete a bachelor's degree at any accredited four-year undergraduate institution in the U.S.

"Our Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship represents a lifeline for exceptional community college students to actualize their academic dreams," said Giuseppe "Seppy" Basili, Executive Director of the Cooke Foundation. "This year's semifinalists exemplify the extraordinary talent found within community colleges across America, and we're excited to congratulate this group as we celebrate a quarter century of work as a Foundation."

The 467 semifinalists were chosen from a pool of more than 1,600 applicants and attend 212 community colleges in 43 states. The rigorous selection process assesses candidates on their exceptional academic ability and achievement, demonstrated financial need, perseverance, and leadership.

The Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship provides comprehensive support that extends far beyond financial assistance, recognizing that admission and enrollment are only the beginning. This scholarship is designed to help students not only reach college but successfully navigate and complete their journey. Selected Cooke Transfer Scholars receive personalized educational advising from the Foundation's Deans of Scholar Support, who guide them through the transition to a four-year institution and help prepare them for future careers. Scholars also gain access to transformative opportunities including internships, study abroad experiences, and graduate school funding, as well as inclusion in a thriving community of more than 3,400 fellow Cooke Scholars and Alumni who provide mentorship and networking connections throughout their academic and professional lives.



## CONNECT WITH US

805.678.5830

OCEAC@VCCCD



@oc.eac





# AB 1225: EXPANDING ACCESSIBILITY IN CALIFORNIA'S STATE PARKS

Studies show that spending time in nature boosts mental and physical well-being. Yet, many individuals with disabilities face obstacles to fully experiencing these benefits. AB 1225 prioritizes equal access, allowing more people to enjoy sightseeing, hiking, picnicking, camping, and outdoor sports. AB 1225 will:

- Establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee to offer expert guidance on improving access to state parks and beaches.
- Amplify the voices of individuals with disabilities in shaping accessibility policies and future park enhancements.
- Promote inclusiveness in outdoor recreation, helping make California's natural spaces truly accessible to all.

AB 1225 is a vital step toward creating equitable and welcoming outdoor experiences for every Californian.

According to the World Health Organization, nearly everyone who lives long enough will experience some form of disability. In California, 11.7% of residents—millions of people—live with disabilities, most commonly related to mobility. Despite this, decisions about access to parks, beaches, trails, and other community spaces are still too often made without the input of those individuals with disabilities.

This bill also empowers the disability community to play an active role in preserving and protecting California's natural spaces.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STOCKCAKE.COM

## EAC STAFF SPOTLIGHT: GABRIELA VALDEZ



Gabriela Valdez is the new Bilingual Student Services Assistant in the EAC. Born in the San Fernando Valley and raised in the city of Oxnard, she is a proud first-generation college graduate. Gabriela earned a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in business management from California State University of Northridge in 2024. Gabriela has nearly four years of experience working for EOPS at Oxnard College, which she feels has allowed her to gain the knowledge to serve a diverse set of students and provide further guidance to help them in their academic journey to higher education. She is grateful to continue her career journey in the EAC at Oxnard College!

Stay Tuned for May's Edition of the EAC Advocate to learn more about Oxnard College Graduation and EAC's Summer Sessions!