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Brenda Marso's daughter, Tiffany Woith, is one of 38 seniors in the Jurupa Unified School District barred from graduation day. Policy does not allow students to participate in graduation if they do not pass one or both parts of the state exit exam.

Some will miss out on graduation day

JURUPA UNIFIED: A district policy bars students from participating in ceremonies if they missed state exit exam marks.

BY SANDRA STOKLEY
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

The mother of a Patriot High School senior said she plans to address Jurupa school board members Monday for not allowing her daughter to participate in Patriot's Tuesday's commencement ceremony.

Brenda Marso's daughter, Tiffany Woith, is one of 38 seniors in the Jurupa Unified School District's class of 2010 barred from graduating with their classmates. District policy does not allow students to participate in graduation if they do not pass one or both parts of the California High School Exit Exam.

Students who don't pass the exit exam but meet the district's graduation requirements receive a certificate of completion instead of a diploma. They can pick it up at the school or get it in the mail.

"It's not fair," Marso said this week. "These kids went through school for four years. They met all their requirements. They're looking forward to graduating with their friends."

Tiffany said she feels the district's policy is robbing her parents of a

once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"It's a special day and I want my parents to see it," she said. "I've waited four years for this."

Marso said her daughter is a good student who passed the English portion of the exit exam in her junior year but had difficulty with the math portion.

"She has trouble with tests. She panics," Marso said.

She took the math portion of the exit exam in March and scored 341. A student needs to score 350 to pass.

Marso attended a school board meeting May 17 to plead that her daughter and other students in the same situation be allowed to take part in commencement. Tearful students appeared at the subsequent meeting on June 7 to beg to be allowed to participate.

On June 7 trustee Mary Burns urged her colleagues to consider issuing waivers to the students to allow them to graduate as an urgency item on the agenda.

"Nobody said a thing," Burns said. "I should have known to make the motion myself. But I didn't."

Marso said "All they're doing is punishing the kids."

"Nobody is punishing anybody's child," Burns said. "The rules are well known by all students. That's why they have so many opportunities to pass the test."

But Burns, who in 2007 seconded the

motion by board member Michael Rodriguez to bar students who had not passed the exit exam from participating in graduating or grad night activities, said she has had a change of heart.

Rodriguez's motion, which passed 4-1, exempted students with disabilities.

Board member John Chavez, now retired, cast the dissenting vote.

"It was not a good decision," Chavez said. "These students completed their requirements and they should graduate just like everybody else."

Burns said she would like to see her colleagues reverse the 2007 decision.

"I think the board made a mistake," Burns said.

Tom Pike, assistant superintendent for executive services at the Corona-Norco Unified School District, said seniors who have completed district graduation requirements but have not passed the state exams are allowed to participate in commencement where they receive a certificate of completion but not a diploma.

Jenny Hirst, an instructional services specialist at Riverside Unified School District, said the district has the identical policy.

The Jurupa board meets in closed and public sessions starting a at 6 p.m. at 4850 Pedley Road.

Reach Sandra Stokley at 951-368-9647 or at sstokley@PE.com

Arraignment continued in child abuse case

RIVERSIDE: A mother of two is facing felony child abuse charges in the beating case.

BY LESLIE PARRILLA
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

A Jurupa-area woman did not enter a plea Thursday in connection with the suspected abuse of her two daughters who were found beaten, bound and gagged on a bedroom floor.

Erica Monique Henry, 24, appeared in court to be arraigned on two felony counts of child abuse. Henry said she planned to hire a private attorney instead of being represented by a public defender. Henry is not in custody.



Erica Monique Henry

Riverside County Superior Court Judge Michael Donner continued the arraignment to Wednesday.

The children's father, Jeremiah Eugene Scott, 23, pleaded not guilty April 6 to seven felony counts of torture, child abuse and corporal punishment of a child in connection with the Feb. 26 incident involving his daughters Miah, then 18 months, and Jasmine, then 4 months. He also is charged with growing marijuana. Scott is scheduled to re-

turn to court July 20 for a felony settlement conference in the abuse case and sentencing for a previous misdemeanor marijuana conviction, according to court records.

Henry and Scott lived in a home in Indian Hills, northwest of Riverside, with Scott's mother and stepfather, who found the children on the bedroom floor. His mother, Carmen Florence, called police.

The girls showed signs of being beaten and were tied up, Riverside County Sheriff's Department Investigators have said. Jasmine was found with a sock stuffed in her mouth, officials said.

The day before, sheriff's deputies had gone to the home for a disturbance call because Scott and Henry had been arguing. Henry left and it's unclear if she returned. Investigators have said she was not in the house during the events leading up to the girls being found the next day.

But Deputy District Attorney Philip Greenberg has said if Henry knew Scott was abusing the children, she was obligated to protect them.

Reach Leslie Parrilla at 951-368-9644 or lparrilla@PE.com

IN BRIEF

CORONA

Torch blamed for Wednesday's fire

A cutting torch at a construction site ignited Wednesday's 46-acre blaze near Highway 91 and Green River Road near Corona, investigators from the Cal Fire/Riverside County Fire Department said Thursday.

The fire was reported at 1:59 p.m. Wednesday. At the height of the blaze, some 200 firefighters were assigned to the incident, along with two air tankers and three water-dropping helicopters. No injuries were reported.

The flames were contained by midnight Wednesday and it was expected to be declared fully extinguished Thursday night.

—Richard Brooks
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Family films to be shown for free

Free movies are being shown at The Crossings in Corona this summer.

The Family Film Festival is being held at 10 a.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays through Aug. 11 at Edwards Corona Crossings, 2650 Tuscan St.

G- or PG-rated films are being shown. Meals for children are for sale. Seating is limited.

Visit REGmovies.com for more information.

—Leslie Parrilla
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RIVERSIDE

Teacher named to state commission

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed Highland Elementary School teacher Steven Dunlap, 30, of Riverside, to the Academic Content Standards Commission.

Dunlap has worked for Riverside Unified School District since 2005 and as an elementary school teacher since 2007. He has been an instructional technology site specialist at Highland since 2008 and data director site trainer since 2007, the governor's office said in a news release. Dunlap earned a Master of Science in education from Cal Baptist University and a bachelor of arts in social science from Simpson University.

The commission is to evaluate the national Common

Core State Standards and make recommendations to the state board of education about California's curriculum.

—Dayna Straehley
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DUI checkpoint set for tonight

Drunken drivers will be targeted for arrest at a DUI checkpoint between 6 p.m. and midnight tonight at an undisclosed location in Riverside, police say.

—Richard Brooks
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NORCO

Naval center earns public affairs award

The Naval Surface Warfare Center Corona in Norco has been awarded a top recognition by the U.S. Navy for excellence in public affairs.

The Thompson-Ravitz Award for Excellence in Navy Public Affairs is given for proactive media relations. The center received it for a communications campaign for an event that attracted nearly 1,000 job seekers for some 1,500 jobs.

The warfare center gauges the war-fighting ability of weapons and integrated combat systems for the U.S. Navy. It is designated as a federal laboratory and houses three national labs and assessment centers.

—Leslie Parrilla
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Texas eyes city utilities manager

RIVERSIDE: David Wright is one of three candidates in the running to head Austin Energy.

BY ALICIA ROBINSON
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Riverside Public Utilities General Manager David Wright is in the running for a job heading the electric utility in Austin, Texas.

Wright, 50, has worked for the city of Riverside for 22 years. He is one of three finalists to become general manager of Austin Electric, a news release from the city of Austin stated.

In Riverside, Wright oversees the city's utilities, which provide water and power to about 300,000 residents and 10,000 business customers. Austin Energy provides electricity to a population of more than 900,000 people and is a community-owned company, so its profits help fund city services, according to the company's website.

"Austin Energy is in the top 10 municipal utilities in the United States. I just think it would be an exciting opportunity," Wright said.

While Austin's electric provider is about three times

the size of Riverside's, Wright said, the two have similar goals as to increasing the use of renewable power sources.

Wright is up against Burbank Water and Power General Manager Ronald Davis and Turlock Irrigation District General Manager Larry Weis for the Austin job. The three will take part in panel interviews June 30 in Austin.

Wright said he stayed in Riverside all these years because "I've loved all the work I've done." That included stints as city controller as well as the utilities' chief financial officer and deputy director.

The city utilities will need to raise rates in the future because of state legislation — for example, complying with a greenhouse gas bill passed in 2006 could increase customers' electric bills 60 percent or more by 2020 — but overall the water and power services are in good shape, Wright said.

"Riverside is well positioned with adequate reserves to meet the challenges of the next decade," he said.

Reach Alicia Robinson at 951-368-9461 or arobinson@PE.com



David Wright

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