**Evan Thoms (English, Spanish, Russian)**

Evan left a lasting impression on us with his extraordinary creativity, dedication, and remarkable levels of empathy. Fluent in Spanish and self-taught in Russian, driven by his future aspirations in cybersecurity, Evan’s passion and commitment led him to achieve the prestigious California Seal of Biliteracy in three languages. However, what truly inspired us was Evan’s profound dedication to assisting a Ukrainian refugee student in navigating the challenges of American high school life. His proficiency in Russian proved invaluable as he provided translation assistance, facilitated communication with peers and teachers, and supported his new friend, Artem, in studying for his classes. Thanks to Evan’s support, Artem was able to successfully complete his studies thousands of miles away from his war-torn country. Evan’s humble reflection on his achievements resonated deeply with us. In his submission, he eloquently expressed, “The Seal of Biliteracy does not mean complete mastery of a language, but it means I have pushed through mistakes, awkward pauses, and misunderstandings in pursuit of connection. It represents a few moments of understanding a native speaker better, writing with slightly improved grammar, or opening oneself to a cultural practice. By earning these Seals, I have gained confidence that I can learn to make connections in any language.” Evan’s achievements and his impact on others make him a truly exceptional individual who embodies the essence of empathy, linguistic proficiency, and cultural understanding.