



Los Angeles County
TEACHERS
of the **YEAR**

Forty Years of Honoring
Teaching Achievement



Los Angeles County
Office of Education

2021-22

Forty Years of Honoring Teaching Achievement



Los Angeles County **TEACHERS** of the **YEAR** **2021-22**

Agenda

- 10:00 Arrival and Check-In / Open Reception
- 11:00 Opening Ceremony
Welcoming Remarks:
Superintendent Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
- 11:25 Presentation of the 16 County Teachers of the Year
- 12:15 Lunch**
- 1:20 Presentation of the Top 10 County Teachers of 2020
- 1:30 Presentation of the 40 District Teachers of the Year
- 2:15 Door Prizes and Grand Prize
Adjourn

Announcement and Awards Luncheon **Friday, September 24, 2021** **Hilton Universal City and Towers**

The 2021-22 Teachers of the Year are outstanding ambassadors for education. By word and by example, they have inspired many young people to consider teaching as a career. For this we thank them.

The Teachers of the Year Program

The Teachers of the Year program is the nation's oldest and most prestigious recognition program to focus public attention on excellence in teaching. The California Teachers of the Year program, which began in 1972, is part of the National Teacher of the Year program, sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with Scholastic, Inc.

District — County

The process begins at the school level. Among teachers nominated or chosen by their colleagues at various schools, one is selected to represent his or her school district in the Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year program, sponsored by the L.A. County Office of Education. (Because they are large districts, Long Beach USD and Los Angeles USD are allowed more than one selection.) This year, the county has 56 district-level Teacher-of-the-Year representatives.

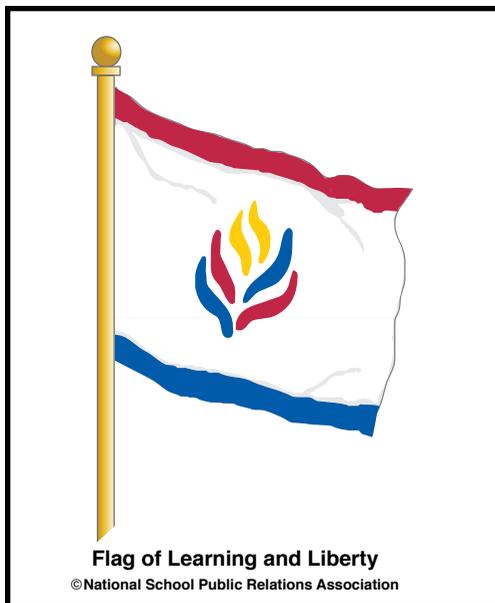
County — State

Each county in California is invited to submit the name(s) of its Teacher(s) of the Year to the California Department of Education (CDE) for the California Teachers of the Year competition. The state annually receives 50–60 nominations—including the 16 that are submitted by Los Angeles County because of its large population. (Los Angeles County has approximately 25 percent of the state's K-12 enrollment.)

State — National

Although a CDE selection committee selects five of the state's finest teachers to be California Teachers of the Year, the national program permits each state to submit only one name for consideration as National Teacher of the Year.

The Flag of Learning and Liberty



The Flag of Learning and Liberty's stylized flame with red, blue and gold elements represents learning, liberty and the foundations of education: high expectations, effective teaching, responsible families and involved communities.

The Flag was developed in the public interest by the National School Public Relations Association in cooperation with the Southland Corporation.

Teacher Christa McAuliffe carried 200 Flags of Learning and Liberty aboard the *Challenger* space shuttle in 1986. One of the flags recovered by NASA was presented to the National School Public Relations Association in 1987.



“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

—Nelson Mandela

California Teachers of the Year

Since our program began in 1983, 42 Los Angeles County teachers have gone on to be selected as California Teachers of the Year:

- 1985 Evaline Khayat Kruse, Los Angeles USD
- 1987 Shirley Rosenkranz, Temple City USD
- 1988 Lorna Mae Nagata, Alhambra SD
- 1993 Patricia Baltz, Arcadia USD (State National Nominee)
Edward Riegler, Alhambra SD
- 1994 Beth Cassford, Little Lake City SD
- 1995 Richard Chapleau, Antelope Valley UHSD (State National Nominee)
Rhoda Paulette Coleman, Lennox SD
- 1996 Cedric Anderson, Los Angeles County Office of Education
Sandy Fleishman, Las Virgenes USD
Javier Gonzalez, Whittier UHSD (State National Nominee)
- 1997 Carole Firestone, Las Virgenes USD
- 1998 Linwood C. Thompson, Bellflower USD
- 1999 Ingrid Boydston, Saugus Union SD
- 2000 Marilyn Whirry, Manhattan Beach USD (National Teacher of the Year)
- 2001 Adele Prince, Glendora USD
- 2002 Mary Eileen Geer, West Covina USD
- 2004 Paul McLaughlin, Walnut Valley USD
- 2005 Kim Labinger, Glendale USD
- 2006 Denis Cruz, Whittier City Elementary SD
Kelly Jean Hanock, Los Angeles USD
- 2007 Dawna Countryman, Saugus Union SD
Helen Papadopoulous, Walnut Valley USD
Alan Sitomer, Lynwood USD
- 2008 Lewis Chappelle, Los Angeles USD (State National Nominee)
Michael Allen Long, South Whittier SD
- 2009 Jose Navarro IV, Los Angeles USD
- 2011 Beverly Gonzalez, Baldwin Park USD
- 2012 Rebecca Mieliwocki, Burbank USD (National Teacher of the Year)
Florence Avognon, Los Angeles County Office of Education
Ken LaVigne, Whittier UHSD
- 2013 Veronica Marquez, Los Angeles USD
- 2014 Michael Hayden, Manhattan Beach USD
- 2015 Maggie Mabery, Manhattan Beach USD (State National Nominee)
Lovelyn Marquez-Prueher, Los Angeles USD
- 2016 Daniel Jocz, Los Angeles USD (State National Nominee)
- 2017 Isela Lieber, Los Angeles USD
- 2018 Erin Oxhorn-Gilpin, Castaic Union SD
Kirsten Farrell, Los Angeles USD
- 2019 Michael Henges, Redondo Beach USD
Kimberlee Holz, Manhattan Beach USD
- 2021 Jim Klipfel, William S. Hart UHSD (State National Nominee)

Acknowledgments

Participants

The Los Angeles County Office of Education and the Los Angeles County Board of Education wish to extend their thanks and gratitude to all the school districts that took part in this year's Teachers of the Year program.

We applaud those in the districts—administrators, coworkers, students and parents—who took the time to write letters in support of their district's Teacher of the Year.

Finally, we congratulate every 2021-22 Teacher of the Year. They have all gone above and beyond in compiling information and writing at length about their lives and careers, their hopes and dreams, and their students. Without their considerable effort in the nominating process, the Teachers of the Year program would not be possible.

Prize Drawing and Donations

Here is a list of companies, organizations and individuals providing door prizes and donations for this year's Awards Luncheon:

Platinum Apple Sponsor



Trusted Partner of the Education Community

The County Teachers of the Year program gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions of the California Credit Union.

Special Thanks

Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year is made possible by the generous support from our partners:



**FLORA L. THORNTON
FOUNDATION**



A Message From the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

September 24, 2021

Welcome to the 40th annual Los Angeles County Office of Education Teachers of the Year Awards program! I applaud the outstanding teachers being honored for their exceptional work.

These teachers demonstrate the very best of a profession dedicated to improving and enriching the lives of children. Their commitment to teaching leaves a positive mark on students that follows them beyond the classroom and benefits our community and our world as they shape the leaders of tomorrow.

Celebrations like today's event are opportunities to recognize remarkable teachers. It is through their efforts that our young people learn, that our state prospers, and that our future improves. Students can take pride in their accomplishments and fondly remember that special teacher who inspired them, encouraged them, and pushed them to do their best in school and in life. Ask just about anyone who made the biggest difference in their life and chances are that person is a teacher.

As California faces teacher shortages, I urge all of you to become ambassadors for the teaching profession. Inspire others to become teachers and share the joys of working with students where you can make an impact and help change lives.

My best wishes go to the Los Angeles County Office of Education Teachers of the Year, the wonderful school community, and the dedicated people who make these ceremonies possible.

Sincerely,

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Los Angeles County
Superintendent of Schools

Welcome to the 2021-22 Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year Awards Luncheon, which pays tribute to the teaching profession and its many thousands of skilled and dedicated practitioners countywide.

As County Superintendent of Schools, I am delighted to host this annual celebration of so many wonderful teachers as our way of thanking them for all the years they have devoted to educating and inspiring our young people in Los Angeles County.

This year, we're paying a special tribute to our teachers for their extraordinary work to engage our students during this unprecedented time. Their great innovations and new, promising practices will last beyond COVID-19 and will benefit our students for many years to come.

While we highlight a special salute to our 16 County Teachers of the Year and wish them well as they go on to the state competition, we at LACOE consider each of our district nominees at this year's awards luncheon a treasure and an exemplar of the highest standards of a distinguished profession.

Thank you for all that you do for our students every day. My warmest congratulations to all of you!


Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Superintendent



**Betty Forrester
President
Los Angeles County Board of Education**

On behalf of the Los Angeles County Board of Education, it is my privilege to raise up the work of all of our Teachers of the Year. Those of us on the Board of Education acknowledge and understand the work you have had to do these past two years.

We know that there is no “tired” like teacher-tired and 2020 and 2021 were tough years in public education. Every year as an educator is different, and Covid-19 complicated the academic challenges and social-emotional issues facing our students. We single you out today as those who used what you knew and learned even more to give more than you thought that you could – and certainly more than you had ever been asked to do before – for your students, their families, and your colleagues.

You don’t do this work for the money, the praise, or the next career step. You are here today as Teacher of the Year in your school district because of your students and the needs you rose to meet. They are why you put in those long hours, exhausting days, sleepless nights, weekend readings, debates, and collaboration with cohorts, friends, and family. You are sharing this with them.

It is our responsibility to give you oars as you raise all boats with you. We will continue to watch and learn as you continue your work. We thank you for making our schools come alive for our students and inspiring them to achieve beyond what they thought was possible in these unprecedented times. Congratulations!


Betty Forrester
Board President



Cindy Wu
President
Los Angeles County School Trustees Association

“A good education can change anyone, A good TEACHER can change EVERYTHING!”

On behalf of Los Angeles County School Trustees Associations (LACSTA), we echo this sentiment. As elected public officials in the K-14 districts, we applaud those of you who are being honored. As an immigrant child myself, teachers were my first impression of America and my first guides as I oriented myself to American culture. Many teachers have made a lifelong impression on me and helped transform me into who I am today. Thank you to all the teachers that made lasting impressions on our children in Los Angeles County.

Teachers transform lives and leave a legacy in their children’s life for generations. I would like to congratulate all honorees who have shown exemplary dedication, compelling classroom practices, positive accomplishments and professional commitment that served as standard-bearers for the teaching profession and among their 72,000 classroom colleagues countywide. It is through your dedication and commitment that we are transforming our community by raising one child at a time. On behalf of LACSTA Trustees within Los Angeles County, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU for what you do every day in the classroom and out of the classroom. THANK YOU for your commitment to our kids and the future of our country. Congratulations to all of you.

Onward and Upward!

Cindy Wu

Cindy Wu
President
Los Angeles County School Trustees Association



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2021-22



Virginia Vasquez

Alhambra Unified School District
San Gabriel High School—AP Language & Composition

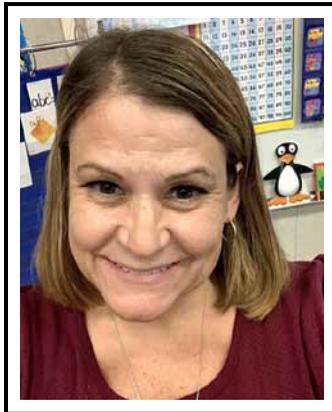
City of Residence: Downey

Years Teaching: 10

Virginia strives to help her AP Language students build their identities as both authors and readers and increase their confidence. She also works to make her classroom a place where voices are heard and relationships are built.

Quote of Note:

Parents' heartfelt words: "Mrs. Vasquez helped our daughters work through school and personal problems and overcome certain barriers they faced in high school."



Kimberly Ashton

Bellflower Unified School District
Ernie Pyle Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Cypress

Years Teaching: 26

Kim is keenly aware that she's responsible for giving her kindergartners what may be their first school experience. It's also up to her, she feels, to show them that, even under trying circumstances, school is important, fun, and that they can learn.

Quote of Note:

A colleague writes, "Kim has a wonderful rapport with people of all ages, especially children, and never hesitates to go the extra mile to assist others."



Amelia Cheatum

Burbank Unified School District
John Muir Middle School—History/Social Studies

City of Residence: Lake Balboa

Years Teaching: 8

Amelia believes the pandemic and remote learning have given her opportunities to reach deeper into the lives of her middle schoolers. She encourages them to create their own personal meaning and understanding of historical events.

Quote of Note:

What higher praise could a student give a History teacher? "In Mrs. Cheatum's class I learned so much about History and had such a great time doing it!"



Yemina Arellanes

Covina Valley Unified School District
Northview High School—American Government/Economics/ELD

City of Residence: Glendora

Years Teaching: 20

Besides her classroom teaching, Yemina has spent countless hours helping students and parents learn that college is "accessible, affordable, and attainable." Her work with Dreamers even got her a mention on the *PBS News Hour*.

Quote of Note:

"She's become such an expert on college planning and financial aid," a colleague notes, "that students and parents from other schools come to meet with her."



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2021-22

Leslie Bartlett

Duarte Unified School District
Duarte High School & Duarte Arts Academy—Drama

City of Residence: Monrovia

Years Teaching: 19

As a drama teacher, Leslie explains that her classroom is a Black Box Theatre. To her it's a sacred space waiting to come alive with her students' voices, personalities and dreams. It can, in short, be anything they want it to be.

Quote of Note:

"Without the encouragement of Mrs. Bartlett," a former student writes, "I wouldn't be the confident person I am today. I'd still be in my old bubble of shyness."



Brittney Guerra

East Whittier City School District
Leffingwell Elementary School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 11

For Brittney, having a student say "That was the best day ever!" is one of the great rewards. It's that kind of excitement that keeps her going through long hours of lesson preparation outside the classroom. Her motto is "Do it for the kids!"

Quote of Note:

"Just entering her classroom," writes her superintendent, "you can clearly see her enthusiasm for teaching and her obvious delight in working with young children."



Amanda Montgomery-Snell

Keppel Union School District
Pearblossom Elementary School—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: Palmdale

Years Teaching: 9

Amanda became an instructional aide right out of high school and has never left the classroom since. Growing up and working in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area, she is committed to helping her students be successful.

Quote of Note:

A parent writes, "My middle son was in her class during distance learning, and I was so impressed with her ability to deliver high-quality lessons virtually."



Andrea Caruso

Los Angeles Unified School District
Grant College Prep & Digital Arts Magnet High School—English

City of Residence: Northridge

Years Teaching: 24

When her students leave her class after their year together, Andrea wants them to understand that "learning takes place wherever they are," and that no matter what their future holds, they should feel "ready and emboldened for the next adventure."

Quote of Note:

"AP English was a rigorous course," a student recalls, "but with Mrs. Caruso's guidance, I was able to finish the class with so much more than I started."





Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2021-22



Rafael Cruz

Los Angeles Unified School District
Hollenbeck Middle School/STEMM Magnet—Forensics/Robotics
City of Residence: Pasadena
Years Teaching: 16

Rafael points with pride to his 7th grade Science/History unit, “Medieval Engineers.” Students did their own research and were able to present and defend their inventions to a NASA engineer, a civil engineer, and a forensic scientist.

Quote of Note:

“Learning online this year may have changed the game,” an ex-student recalls, “but it didn’t stop Mr. Cruz from providing his students with learning enrichments.”



Jason Myung

Los Angeles Unified School District
Franklin Dual Language Academy Magnet—Math/Algebra
City of Residence: Los Angeles
Years Teaching: 17

Jason has vowed never to give up on a child who is struggling. Instead, he looks for new ways to show the student how a particular math problem can be solved, and keeps looking until he finds a way that works best for their learning style.

Quote of Note:

An admiring colleague writes, “Mr. Myung organizes our Math Field Day and also makes sure that students have clubs, sports and fun outings and activities.”



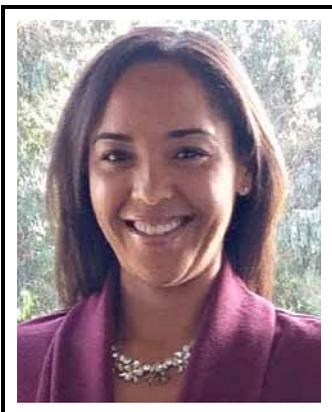
Julie Silk

Pasadena Unified School District
Jackson STEM Dual Language Magnet Academy—First Grade
City of Residence: Pasadena
Years Teaching: 19

Teaching is more than academics, Julie believes. It is compassion, inclusion and creating opportunities that will eventually make a difference in the world. She views her students as unique individuals who deserve to have a voice and choice.

Quote of Note:

A mother’s heartfelt words: “Being invited to participate in my son’s first-grade class offered me a way to share our family’s cultural background from India.”



Sarah Robinson

Redondo Beach Unified School District
Redondo Union High School—Spanish
City of Residence: Torrance
Years Teaching: 15

Sarah joins her high school’s other Spanish-language teachers to organize an annual *Día de los Muertos*, displaying the art work of a thousand-plus students. The popular event now includes crafts, salsa dancing and Hispanic cuisine.

Quote of Note:

“More often than not,” writes a friend and colleague, “whenever I pass by outside Sarah’s Spanish classroom, I can hear the students erupting with laughter.”



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2021-22

Amanda Riisager

South Whittier School District
Graves Middle School—English/Coding

City of Residence: Fullerton

Years Teaching: 15

Amanda recalls how as a child, inspired by her first-grade teacher, she set up her stuffed animals and started instructing them. This desire to share everything she was learning and experiencing shaped her into the educator she is today.

Quote of Note:

“As the pandemic arose,” her principal writes, “Ms. Riisager assisted us with all the new technology and provided leadership during an extremely difficult time.”



Laurie San Miguel

West Covina Unified School District
Cameron Elementary School—Third Grade

City of Residence: Pomona

Years Teaching: 25

Responding to the pandemic, Laurie created a schoolwide origami art project that could be created from home. The creation and subsequent installation of the thousand hanging folded paper cranes greeted students on their return to campus.

Quote of Note:

Her principal calls “Ms. San Miguel a cornerstone of our staff. Her willingness to do whatever it takes to support the school community is wonderfully contagious.”



Shelley Turski

William S. Hart Union High School District
La Mesa Junior High School—Physical Science/Special Education

City of Residence: Stevenson Ranch

Years Teaching: 34

Over the course of her 34 years in education, Shelley estimates she’s had a direct impact on more than five-thousand young people. One of her great rewards is when former students tell her of the positive ways she has impacted their lives.

Quote of Note:

Praise from a colleague: “Over the past eight years I’ve watched Shelley display leadership skills matched only by her knowledge and genuine joy of teaching.”



Joan Hammond

Wilsona School District
Vista San Gabriel Elementary School—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: Lancaster

Years Teaching: 19

Starting as a teacher nearly twenty years ago, Joan vowed her classroom would be a place where learning could be fun, not drudgery, and where each student would feel they mattered. Her fourth-graders continue to benefit from that pledge.

Quote of Note:

“Joan gives all of her heart and soul to every task she tackles,” writes an enthusiastic colleague. “She always teaches with fidelity and pizzazz.”





Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2020-21

Regrettably, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, last year's County Teachers of the Year did not have the opportunity for an in-person awards ceremony. We are pleased to have last year's Top Ten at this year's awards luncheon and to list them here with our congratulations.



Timothy Green

Antelope Valley Union High School District
Highland High School—Engineering/Public Service/Fire Science
City of Residence: Leona Valley
Years Teaching: 20

In two decades in his Antelope Valley district, Tim has taught automotive and engineering at Palmdale High; and now, at Highland High, public service, engineering and robotics, plus being lead instructor at an afterschool fire training center.

Quote of Note:

A district administrator comments, "Tim's work in increasing the number of females involved in STEM and Fire Science areas has been truly impressive."



Maria Sims

Azusa Unified School District
Azusa High School—Mathematics
City of Residence: West Covina
Years Teaching: 15

As an immigrant and English learner, Maria Sims understands the far-reaching impact teachers can have. Because of this, she engages with her students not only in class, but during lunch, after school, and even on Saturdays for extra math tutoring.

Quote of Note:

A student looks back in gratitude: "Mrs. Sims motivated us to never give up, and she never gave up on any of us. I believe I am a better student today because of her."



Wendy Payan

Baldwin Park Unified School District
Sierra Vista High School—AP World History/US History/Geography
City of Residence: Pasadena
Years Teaching: 16

In Wendy's classroom, it's not just History that is taught, but life lessons. Fun activities like "Talk to Me Tuesdays" and "Work Habit Wednesdays" give students a chance to ask questions, sharpen study habits and acquire real-life skills before lectures begin.

Quote of Note:

An ex-student writes, "Mrs. Payan goes far beyond what is asked of her by staying in the classroom during lunch and after school to help students with their studies."



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2020-21

Ericca Dent

Burbank Unified School District
Joaquin Miller Elementary School—Second Grade
City of Residence: North Hollywood
Years Teaching: 8

Ericca’s commitment to continued achievement for her second-graders is rooted in addressing their social-emotional needs. Her teachable moments go beyond academics as she seeks to create a space for students to be themselves and make mistakes.

Quote of Note:

A parent shares her gratitude: “Mrs. Dent encouraged writing and creativity skills that were essential for my daughter to advance in her critical thinking in later grades.”



Anna Paliza

Keppel Union School District
Keppel Academy—English Language Arts/Social Studies/AVID/ELD
City of Residence: Palmdale
Years Teaching: 21

In addition to her classroom teaching at Keppel Academy, Annie is a member of multiple school site teams, including Leadership, AVID and PBIS. She’s also English Learner Coordinator and advises the Yearbook Club and Video Production Club.

Quote of Note:

“Annie is an inspirational leader who impacts many students, colleagues, parents and community members by simply conversing with them,” notes an admiring colleague.



Rhiannon Chavez

Los Angeles Unified School District
186th Street Elementary School—Fourth Grade
City of Residence: San Pedro
Years Teaching: 15

Rhiannon teaches English Language Learners and Reading Recovery. She prides herself on building healthy relationships with students and their families. Benefitting from her high expectations, her students continue to thrive academically and artistically.

Quote of Note:

“Mrs. Chavez helped my son reclassify in ELD and even nurtured in him a love for school and homework,” recalls one grateful mom. “I don’t know how she did it!”



Hazel Witham

Los Angeles Unified School District
Venice High School—English
City of Residence: Los Angeles
Years Teaching: 19

Besides teaching English Language Arts to 10th- and 12th-graders, Hazel coaches spoken word poetry at Venice High School. One of her great teaching joys is listening to her students’ stories and nurturing a classroom community of readers and writers.

Quote of Note:

“Hazel’s passion for teaching continues at home,” notes a colleague, “practicing Spanish with her two boys who are enrolled in an LAUSD dual immersion program.”





Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2020-21



Daniel Calma

Norwalk La Mirada Unified School District
Johnston Elementary School—Third Grade

City of Residence: Orange

Years Teaching: 23

Four years ago, after nine rewarding years in first grade, Dan skipped all the way up to fourth to stake a new claim on classroom excellence. In fact, in his 23-year career at Johnston Elementary, he has now taught at every grade level from K through 5.

Quote of Note:

His principal offers high praise: “Mr. Calma’s passion for improving the lives of children makes him a perfect candidate for Los Angeles County Teacher of the Year.”



Leslie Spainhower

Redondo Beach Unified School District
Adams Middle School—English Honors/Literacy Workshop

City of Residence: Los Angeles

Years Teaching: 8

Besides being an induction mentor for new teachers at Adams Middle School, Leslie has taught honors and general education language arts, literacy intervention, creative writing and theater production, and even stepped in to direct several school plays.

Quote of Note:

“I have seen teachers grow and blossom under her mentorship,” observes her appreciative principal. “She won’t ask of others what she’s not willing to ask of herself.”



James Klipfel

William S. Hart Union High School District
Saugus High School—Social Studies/Athletics

City of Residence: Agua Dulce

Years Teaching: 26

Although Jim’s classroom focus is on teaching AP and standard college prep U.S. History, he has gone above and beyond as his school’s swim and dive team coach, Science Olympiad team leader, and director of the campus Habitat for Humanity club.

Quote of Note:

A grateful parent shares her memory of a special teacher: “Both of my daughters would come home talking about what Mr. Klipfel had discussed in History class that day.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22

Nicole Chun

Acton Agua-Dulce Unified School District

Acton Agua-Dulce District Office—K-8

City of Residence: Canyon Country

Years Teaching: 20

As a Teacher on Special Assignment, Nicole provides instructional and program support to families enrolled in her district's K-8 home-school program. For the prior twenty years she was a classroom teacher in both general and special education.

Quote of Note:

A district administrator speaks out, "In our small district (60 teachers in all), Mrs. Chun stands out as a leader, collaborator and consummate professional."



Leonard Morena

Antelope Valley Union High School District

Virtual Academy of the Antelope Valley—Career Technical Education

City of Residence: Palmdale

Years Teaching: 21

It was vocational career classes that first sparked Leonard's interest in school. Adapting the easygoing style of a favorite teacher, he altered his own classroom to mirror a typical workplace with students taking turns as project managers.

Quote of Note:

A parent's moving testimonial: "Through Mr. Morena and Skills USA, my daughter found her career path in computer science and years later got a job in software engineering."



Sharon Pasqua

Arcadia Unified School District

Camino Grove Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Duarte

Years Teaching: 32

Among the unexpected positives resulting from the past year of online teaching and learning, in Sharon's view, have been greater collaboration among teachers and more great frequent guest speakers due to the ease of access to virtual meetings.

Quote of Note:

A Kindergarten-teaching colleague writes, "Sharon is my go-to K teacher when I need a sympathetic thought-partner to bounce ideas off or consult with for best practices."



Dante Infante Sanchez

Azusa Unified School District

Gladstone High School—English ASB/Drama

City of Residence: Pasadena

Years Teaching: 9

Dante found himself becoming an agent of stability in the past turbulent year. He let students turn in late work and retaught lessons if asked. Even if it means giving students multiple chances, he believes in never shutting the door to their success.

Quote of Note:

High praise from a student body president: "I believe I speak for all ASB students when I say Mr. Infante gave us a blueprint for succeeding in the real world."



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22



Veronica Valdez

Baldwin Park Unified School District
Kenmore Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: West Covina

Years Teaching: 23

As a former student of her district’s schools, Veronica is aware of the many challenges her first-graders face on a daily basis. Her greatest reward, she writes, “comes from knowing I have inspired children in my care to believe in themselves.”

Quote of Note:

A colleague writes, “Not only is Veronica a great teacher, but she has given up personal time to help other teachers, especially in using new classroom technology.”



Lorena Rosas

Bassett Unified School District
Sunkist Elementary School—Transitional Kindergarten

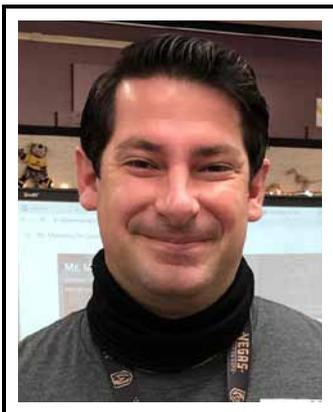
City of Residence: Los Angeles

Years Teaching: 25

Hands-on work remains Lorena’s preference, but the pandemic not only caused her to expand and innovate her teaching resources but helped her to launch her transitional kindergarten students on their educational journey and support their needs.

Quote of Note:

A grateful mother says, “Mrs. Rosas’ patience and enthusiasm to have fun while teaching her students allowed my son to thrive in an unpredictable environment.”



Brian Malette

Castaic Union School District
Live Oak Elementary School—Transitional Kindergarten

City of Residence: Castaic

Years Teaching: 6

After college, Brian went to work for the district he grew up in. He loves teaching “our littlest learners,” as he calls his kindergarten students, and watching them grow and develop. After classes he also enjoys coaching football at nearby Valencia High.

Quote of Note:

“Brian is an amazing teacher and a huge asset to our staff,” notes a colleague. “His high energy and positive perspective greatly enrich our school atmosphere.”



Ruth Cebberos

Centinela Valley Union High School District
Hawthorne High School—U.S. History/EL Coordinator

City of Residence: Lomita

Years Teaching: 22

in the course of her 20-plus-year career, Ruth has been a paraprofessional, teacher, school counselor, dean of students, and coordinator. In each of these roles, she has been committed to serving and empowering English Learners.

Quote of Note:

A colleague writes, “As a campus leader of Students Run LA, Ruth has inspired students to train and complete half and full marathons during the pandemic.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22

Lisa Schuster

Claremont Unified School District
Sycamore Elementary School—Multi-Age/Fourth-Fifth-Sixth Grade
City of Residence: Claremont
Years Teaching: 17

Favorite teaching memories in Lisa’s 17-year career include living museums and musicals performed by her students. She also enjoys the chance to develop ongoing relationships with students in her multi-age 4th-through-6th grade class.

Quote of Note:

“During the pandemic,” notes a colleague, “Lisa’s science-themed and fun-filled Camp Home ’n’ Zoom helped replace our sixth-graders’ Outdoor Science School.”



Ruth Reyes

Compton Unified School District
Tibby Elementary School—Fifth Grade & GATE
City of Residence: Los Angeles
Years Teaching: 25

This year two of Ruth’s fifth-grade science students won her district’s balloon car challenge for distance and design. Coaching her school’s robotics team has been a rewarding challenge, both overseeing and enjoying many innovative projects.

Quote of Note:

A fond recollection from a former student: “Miss Reyes is the teacher that has a long-lasting impact on your life—the one you remember in the years to come.”



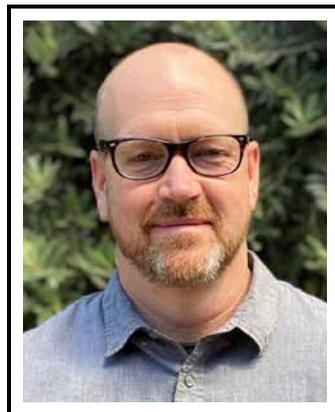
Craig Wisner

Culver City Unified School District
Culver City High School—Art/Ceramics
City of Residence: Altadena
Years Teaching: 20

As an art and ceramics teacher, Craig strives to make his classroom studio a place where students can express their innate desire to create and play, and also to learn to appreciate the small joys of life and tell and share their stories along the way.

Quote of Note:

A principal’s salute: “Mr. Wisner helped me to see how the arts can help students not only explore their creativity but embrace their differences and cultures.”



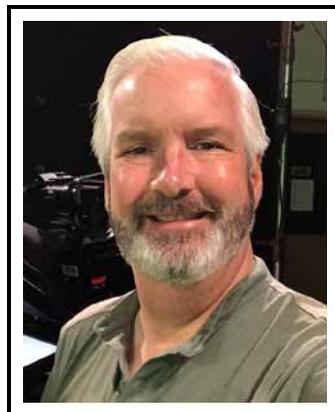
John Mann

El Monte Union High School District
Mountain View High School—Career Technical Ed/Video Production
City of Residence: Long Beach
Years Teaching: 4

John came to his CTE Film-Video Production course with stellar credentials—25 years in the film industry as cameraman and editor with two Emmy nominations. During the pandemic he began live-streaming school events for convenient home viewing.

Quote of Note:

A student shares her pride and excitement: “Mr. Mann’s video production course is preparing us for possible careers in the film and entertainment industries.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22



Roxanne O'Rourke

Glendale Unified School District
Horace Mann Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Glendale

Years Teaching: 22

An occasional reward for Roxanne is seeing former students as successful adults and hearing fond memories of their Kindergarten experience. But an everyday reward is seeing her hard work and commitment contributing to student success.

Quote of Note:

A grateful parent writes, “Mrs. O’Rourke fostered a strong home-to-school connection through her weekly newsletters, phone messages and emails.”



Indu Afandalor

Glendora Unified School District
Stanton Elementary School—K-2 Special Education

City of Residence: Fontana

Years Teaching: 20

Wouldn’t it be amazing, Indu wonders, if all students had access to both general and special education teachers? If this vision ever became reality, she believes, there would be a new generation of kids learning to accept each other’s differences and abilities.

Quote of Note:

A special education colleague remarks, “Mrs. Afandalor clearly believes in her special needs students, and in return you can see them beginning to believe in themselves.”



Dina De La O-Johnson

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District
Sparks Elementary School—Kindergarten/First Grade

City of Residence: Covina

Years Teaching: 23

Dina enjoys mentoring teacher interns because each experience gives her new perspectives and appreciation for her own classroom practices. These relationships among colleagues and future teachers, she adds, have led to lifelong friendships.

Quote of Note:

A student teacher recalls, “Dina created so many learning opportunities during my student teaching. Time after time she encouraged me to try, try, and try again.”



Carolyn Johnson

Inglewood Unified School District
Payne P-8 STEAM Academy—Special Education

City of Residence: Los Angeles

Years Teaching: 31

Carolyn recalls the words of educator Rita Pierson, “Every child deserves a champion.” Judging from the number of heartfelt alumni visits she gets, Carolyn has been a champion for a myriad of scholars over the three-decade span of her career.

Quote of Note:

An administrator praises Carolyn as “a role model committed to supporting every child to achieve academic and social growth inside and outside her classroom.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22

Dan Yoder

La Canada Unified School District
La Canada High School—U.S. History/Psychology

City of Residence: Monrovia

Years Teaching: 21

Dan wears many hats at La Canada High School. In addition to teaching U.S. History and Psychology, he has been Social Science department chair, coached football, regularly organizes extracurricular activities and volunteers for school committees.

Quote of Note:

According to an appreciative colleague, “Dan spends hours of his own time pursuing his own professional development and then seeking ways to apply this to his classroom.”



Amy Jensen

Lancaster School District
Northrop Elementary School—K-5/Instructional Coach

City of Residence: Murietta

Years Teaching: 39

Amy closed her 39-year teaching career this June, most of it with the Lancaster School District. As a Reading Specialist and Instructional Coach, she has been passionate about helping her youngest students gain a good foundation in early literacy skills.

Quote of Note:

Fond words from a fellow teacher: “Amy tells me that her great joy has been observing colleagues grow and thrive as she has worked beside them in a coaching role.”



Dana Dickson

Las Virgenes Unified School District
Wright Middle School—Special Education

City of Residence: Thousand Oaks

Years Teaching: 26

The friendly outreach of an elementary school teacher twenty-six years ago opened a door for a troubled nine-year-old girl. Today Dana is a teacher herself, working every day to pay that long ago favor forward and make a similar difference in young lives.

Quote of Note:

“My son started middle school feeling anxious,” writes a grateful mom, “but Ms. Dickson’s warm and caring nature encouraged him to share his personal concerns.”



Matiana Elias

Little Lake City School District
Lakeview Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Norwalk

Years Teaching: 21

While the last school year is remembered for having been taught mostly online, Matiana chooses to remember the in-person celebration she devised to end it—a Kindergarten Drive-In Movie Theater with her students parked six-feet apart in cardboard-box cars.

Quote of Note:

“After Mrs. Elias taught my first son,” a grateful mother writes, “I would have jumped through hoops to guarantee that my baby son also got into her kindergarten class.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22



Sarah Schol

Long Beach Unified School District
Long Beach Polytechnical High School—English/Language Arts

City of Residence: Lakewood

Years Teaching: 8

Sarah strives to make English literature more accessible with unconventional teaching methods. These include group novel-reading outside on the quad, setting Shakespeare to a hip-hop beat and sermon-writing assignments to teach Colonial literature.

Quote of Note:

“In her class,” a student recalls, “we held mock job interviews, resumé-writing workshops and finance lessons, all while writing essays, reading texts and taking tests.”



Maricel Edwards

Los Angeles County Office of Education
International Polytechnic High School—English

City of Residence: Fontana

Years Teaching: 24

Maricel’s CV lists forays into retail management, PR and event planning. But for the past 24 years she’s found her home as a high school English teacher all over the grade level map at International Polytechnic High School. Oh, and by night she writes novels.

Quote of Note:

“You have to admire Maricel’s passion for English,” notes a campus colleague, “as a dedicated teacher by day, then, after work, an equally dedicated fiction writer.”



Edna Losa

Los Angeles Unified School District
Sylmar Biotech Health & Engineering Magnet—Math/Physics/Engineering

City of Residence: Santa Clarita

Years Teaching: 32

Edna thinks that, in many ways, the pandemic has brought out the best in her profession. “It has taught us to be resourceful, innovative, and digitally adept.” Teachers are relying on one another and collaborating more to help their students succeed.

Quote of Note:

Superlative praise from a colleague: “Ms. Losa’s enthusiasm and passion for teaching (and for her students) are unrivaled on our staff. And we have an incredible faculty!”



Di Gia Vuong

Los Angeles Unified School District
Solano Avenue Elementary School—Second Grade

City of Residence: Monrovia

Years Teaching: 18

Di Gia’s Vietnamese refugee parents were only minimally involved with her education. Her inspiration came at school from her American teachers. This is why, she says, she goes out of her way to form personal connections with each of her second-graders.

Quote of Note:

Her principal notes that “Mrs. Vuong takes time to help students perfect a speech, reflect on their decisions, and provides them opportunities to demonstrate empathy.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22

Custodio Gomez

Lynwood Unified School District
Lynwood High School— World History

City of Residence: Chino Hills

Years Teaching: 6

It was Custodio’s high school Social Studies teacher who set him on the path to becoming a History teacher. That teacher, on learning that his former pupil was Teacher of the Year for Lynwood, told him it was now his turn to inspire the next generation.

Quote of Note:

“Our son thought of history as dry and boring before taking Mr. Gomez’ class,” a proud parent writes. “Now it’s his favorite subject, and he even talks about it at home.”



Kristin Ford

Monrovia Unified School District
Monrovia High School— Biology/AP Biology

City of Residence: Monrovia

Years Teaching: 21

Kristin thinks of her biology classes as families and loves attending their soccer and baseball games, their school plays and graduation parties. Knowing her students and their families personally she regards as one of the treasured rewards of teaching.

Quote of Note:

“Both my children were in Mrs. Ford’s biology class,” a mother writes, “and I’m convinced their experience with her helped them to be more successful students.”



Elizabeth Kocharian

Montebello Unified School District
Bell Gardens High School— World History/Government/Economics

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 19

Over the years, Elizabeth has worked to get better at listening to her students. She tries to connect with each one every day and impart a positive message. Some are shocked when told they *can* do something, because no one has ever believed in them before.

Quote of Note:

“Mrs. K’s lectures were always interesting,” writes an admiring ex-student. “I would be immediately hooked. She had everything planned out and would explain it so well.”



Marcos Garcia

Mountain View School District
Kranz Intermediate School— Math/Science/Journalism

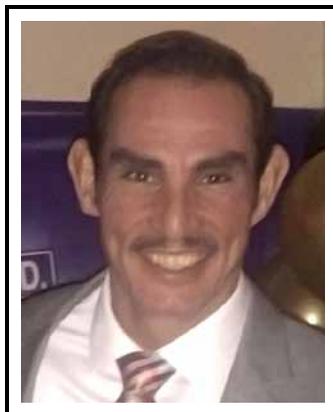
City of Residence: Azusa

Years Teaching: 23

Marcos believes the phrase “lifelong learners” should apply to teachers learning to incorporate 21st century skills to further the success of their students. He works with teachers who are intimidated by technology, helping them become digitally competent.

Quote of Note:

“Mr. Garcia’s journalism class wrote, filmed and edited their own news stories,” writes a fellow teacher. “Several of his students won awards for their creative videos.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22



Annie Chen

Norwalk La Mirada Unified School District
Benton Visual & Performing Arts Magnet—7th Gr. Math/Accelerated Math

City of Residence: Brea

Years Teaching: 12

Annie credits her mother for instilling a work ethic that helped her overcome challenges of learning English as a second language. But it was a series of amazing teachers who created a classroom culture of acceptance that made Annie want to emulate them.

Quote of Note:

A student recalls a memorable year: “Mrs. Chen never ignored a student in need, whether by answering their math homework questions or giving encouragement.”



Adriana Garza

Palmdale School District
Tumbleweed Elementary School—Second Grade

City of Residence: Palmdale

Years Teaching: 15

Adriana wants each of her second-graders to know she cares about them and how they do in school. Knowing how important it is to be recognized, she is careful to pronounce each name correctly and to give individual affirmations as well as group shout-outs.

Quote of Note:

A colleague says that Adriana’s “crazy sunglasses day, dance party day and crazy hair day all help give her second-graders a reason to join their daily Zoom sessions.”



Patricia Lee Petrucci

Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District
Ridgecrest Intermediate School—Special Education

City of Residence: Palos Verdes Estates

Years Teaching: 47

Patricia, known by her colleagues as Patti, has taught for 47 years, most of them in Palos Verdes. A cancer survivor and single parent, she has overcome many obstacles in her life and was among the first teachers in her district to return for live instruction.

Quote of Note:

An administrator adds: “Patti was instrumental ensuring that classrooms were safe and ready to open, as well as volunteering at vaccination clinics for district employees.”



Grace Yu

Paramount Unified School District
Paramount Park Middle School—Middle School Math

City of Residence: Temple City

Years Teaching: 14

Teaching math in a district comprised of minorities, Grace makes a conscious effort to show her students minority role models in class and has hosted guest-speaker panels comprised of minorities who share their challenges and successes in the STEAM field.

Quote of Note:

A math student remembers: “Everything in Ms. Yu’s class was so easy because she would reach for the stars to make sure we understood what she was teaching us.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22

Jenny Cheung

Rosemead School District
Janson Elementary School—ELD/Intervention

City of Residence: Rosemead
Years Teaching: 5

Jenny has been playing an essential role in her school’s implementation of the Leader in Me Lighthouse School standards. In addition to being one of two Leader in Me coaches, she supports her colleagues as the schoolwide technology lead.

Quote of Note:

A student expresses his sincere gratitude: “Thank you, Ms. Cheung, for teaching me English. Your teaching method makes it easier for me to learn English.”



Ashley McGrath

Rowland Unified School District
Shelyn Elementary School—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: West Covina
Years Teaching: 4

Ashley launched the Kindergarten Community of Practice across her district. In fact, she is largely responsible for the design and implementation of the kindergarten remote learning program that was put into practice districtwide as a result of Covid 19.

Quote of Note:

“Ashley’s imagination for what is possible rubs off on others,” comments an administrator. “She is always willing to provide support for her colleagues.”



Elizabeth Hand

Saugus Union School District
Saugus Union School District Office—TK/Early Literacy

City of Residence: Santa Clarita
Years Teaching: 27

In her many years in Saugus Union, Liz has taught grades Kindergarten through Second. Currently, as a Teacher on Special Assignment, she serves on multiple district committees and focuses on Early Literacy in all of Saugus’ TK classrooms.

Quote of Note:

“Mrs. Hand is an incredible leader and educator,” writes her superintendent. “Her passion for student learning and fierce support of her colleagues make her a gem.”



Christina Torres

South Pasadena Unified School District
Monterey Hills Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Pasadena
Years Teaching: 11

Christina had many early job experiences working with children, but didn’t pursue a credential. She just couldn’t see herself in charge of a classroom. Only when working in an after-school program did she realize that she’d found her “happy place in life.”

Quote of Note:

Enthusiastic words from an administrator turned consultant and colleague: “Christina is a natural—a natural educator, a natural mentor and a natural cultural builder.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2021-22



Kyle Smith

Temple City Unified School District
Temple City Unified School District—Band/Orchestra

City of Residence: Duarte

Years Teaching: 12

The opportunity to be a positive influence and role model for his students is the reason that Kyle is a teacher and why he encourages others to go into the field. “This amazing responsibility,” he writes, “is even more important than teaching our subject matter.”

Quote of Note:

An ex-student remembers how “back in elementary school, in our early morning class, Mr. Smith would always wake up me and my sleepy classmates with his lively tunes.”



Laura Jane Boushell

Torrance Unified School District
Towers Elementary School—First/Second Combination

City of Residence: El Segundo

Years Teaching: 25

Laura Jane believes in an expansive job description for “elementary school teacher.” Hers includes reading and writing, arts and crafts, how to grow vegetables and trees in a school garden—everything that makes an enriching childhood experience at school.

Quote of Note:

A grateful colleague recalls his daughter’s classroom time: “My daughter became a reader and author in Laura Jane’s class and incorporates her teaching in everyday life.”



Sylvia Chen

Walnut Valley Unified School District
Walnut Elementary School—Fourth Grade/Mandarin Dual Immersion

City of Residence: Brea

Years Teaching: 5

Sylvia faced the trials of being an English Learner for many years after moving here from Taiwan during sixth grade. This ignited her passion to support her own dual immersion students who face similar obstacles in speaking a non-native language.

Quote of Note:

“Sylvia challenges herself by constantly sharpening her teaching skills,” writes her principal. “Her positive attitude can be seen clearly in everything she does.”



Letty Mendoza

Whittier City School District
Hoover Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 21

Throughout the pandemic, Letty has worked to convey her love of teaching and learning despite the restrictions of Zoom classes. Happily, her hard work and infectious enthusiasm have been rewarded daily by the happy faces of her online kindergartners.

Quote of Note:

A principal has high praise for this kindergarten teacher: “Mrs. Mendoza is creative, collaborative, innovative, and a shining star in the Whittier City School District.”

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