



Los Angeles County
TEACHERS
of the **YEAR**

HONORING
TEACHING ACHIEVEMENT
2022-2023



Los Angeles County
Office of Education

In Honor of Teaching Achievement



Los Angeles County **TEACHERS** of the **YEAR** **2022-23**

Agenda

10:00 Arrival and Check-In / Open Reception

11:00 Opening Ceremony

Welcoming Remarks:

Millie Liao, LACHSA Senior

Master of Ceremonies:

Deputy Superintendent Maria Martinez-Poulin, Ed.D.

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

11:10 California TOY Speech:

Virginia Vasquez, Alhambra USD

11:15 Presentation of the 16 County Teachers of the Year

12:15 Lunch

1:20 Presentation of the 50 District Teachers of the Year

2:15 Door Prizes and Grand Prize

2:20 Adjourn

Announcement and Awards Luncheon

Friday, September 23, 2022

Hilton Universal City and Towers

The 2022-23 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 66 district-level Teacher-of-the-Year representatives.

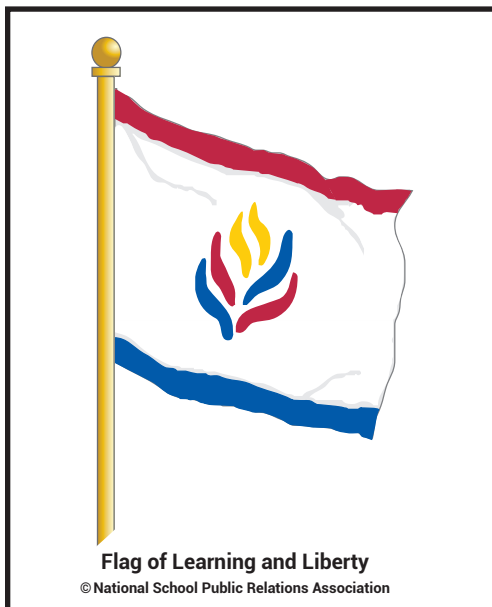
County – State

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.



"Every student deserves a champion."

—Educator Rita Pierson

California Teachers of the Year

Since our program began in 1983, 43 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 Chappellear, 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)
- 2022 Virginia Vasquez, Alhambra USD

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 2022-23 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:





A Message From the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

September 23, 2022

Welcome to the 41st annual Los Angeles County Office of Education Teachers of the Year Awards program! I applaud our outstanding educators and commend them for their exceptional work.

The last two-and-a-half years have been, for many teachers, the most challenging times of their careers. Yet countless educators stepped up and spent time connecting with and supporting students and families during a time of remote learning, isolation, and uncertainty. This commitment leaves a deep and lasting impression on students. What you instill in students follows them beyond the classroom and helps our communities.

California has come a long way over the last decade, nearly tripling the funding in K–12 public schools since 2011 through record investments, including an unprecedented 13 percent increase to the Local Control Funding Formula. Additionally, through our continued advocacy and legislative efforts, California invested an unprecedented \$1.5 billion for professional learning for educators and will continue to diversify the teacher workforce through the Educator Effectiveness Block Grant. Through my workgroup on addressing education workforce shortages and diversifying the profession, which includes our past Teachers of the Year, we are working to build a pipeline of educators and school counselors to meet our students' needs. The California Department of Education will continue to advocate for sustained funding for public education, more resources for our students, and better supports for our educators. And, as we work to highlight the teaching profession and recruit more educators, I encourage all of you join our efforts to help inspire others to become teachers and share the joys of working with our students so they can also make an impact and help change lives.

Celebrations like this event are opportunities to recognize remarkable teachers like you who work so hard to ensure that our young people learn, our state prospers, and our future improves. My best wishes and warm congratulations 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Thurmond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



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

Welcome to the 2022-23 Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year Awards Luncheon. As Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, I am honored to host this annual event in recognition of the thousands of incredible teachers from across L.A. County who dedicate their lives to children.

The COVID-19 pandemic created great challenges for our teachers. They were asked to dramatically shift their practices in a remote, hybrid and in-person learning environment to ensure safety for students and staffs.

Our teachers not only met the challenges, they rose above them to identify innovative ways to engage our young people in a disruptive environment. The contributions of our teachers will benefit students for decades to come.

While we highlight a special salute to our 16 County Teachers of the Year and wish them well as they move into state competition, we at LACOE consider each of our district nominees a model of the highest standards of the teaching profession.

Thank you for the time, energy and heart you dedicate to our students every day. My warmest congratulations to all of you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Duardo". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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



**James Cross
President
Los Angeles County Board of Education**

On behalf of the Los Angeles County Board of Education it is indeed an honor and a privilege to welcome all of you to the LA County Teachers of the Year 2022. It seems almost trite to talk about the difficult challenges you all have endured these last few years. Yet, they were difficult times. Times that challenged our patience, our creativity and even our endurance. Those of you here today stand as testimony, not only that you survived but that you flourished. Just think about all the new and unique things we have learned about how to reach out to our kids over the last couple of years.

I was always jealous of the teachers at the school where I worked. They had the opportunity to touch the students each day in a caring and personal way. Kids hung out with them after school. Brought them some sort of surprise gift after school breaks, and some even returned after graduating to say hello and to express their thanks. What a special thing it is to be a teacher and to be able to shape and influence so many young lives.

We all know the challenges are not over. There is still much to do; but for now, it is time to slow down, take a deep breath, and reflect on how far we have come. You are here today as Teachers of The Year! It is a time for you to celebrate and be recognized. Not only did you persevere, but you rose to the occasion and above the many difficulties and challenges. You continue to make positive impacts on so many young lives with your dedication and professionalism. You are a model to teachers everywhere.

The entire County Board salutes you, supports you, and thanks you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Cross', written in a cursive style.

James Cross
Board President



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Alexa Lepp

Acton Agua-Dulce Unified School District
Vasquez High School—TOSA/All Subjects

City of Residence: Palmdale

Years Teaching: 10

As a Teacher on Special Assignment, Alexa teaches ASB, Work Experience and APEX digital courses along with coaching Vasquez High's girls' soccer team. She believes "our mistakes provide us valuable learning opportunities, in education and life."

Quote of Note:

A former student offers this high praise: "Mrs. Lepp is an amazing person and teacher. Her positive and infectious energy has helped to transform our campus."



Kerin Coffey

Antelope Valley Union High School District
Eastside High School—Ninth Grade/Honors Biomedical Science

City of Residence: Lancaster

Years Teaching: 24

If asked about the rewards of teaching, Kerin recalls a troubled ninth-grader who turned into a leading student in her Biomedical Academy by senior year. Kerin not only helped this girl fill out college applications but drove her to tour local college campuses.

Quote of Note:

An administrator writes, "Kerin blurs the lines between school, community, college and career for her students, empowering them to set high aspirations for themselves."



Michelle Stradford

Beverly Hills Unified School District
Horace Mann School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Los Angeles

Years Teaching: 15

In her fifth-grade classroom, Michelle tries to create an environment where students can speak up, are heard, and can champion others. She also wants them to feel that it's okay to give an opinion, ask for help, or make a mistake without feeling embarrassed.

Quote of Note:

"Michelle Stradford embodies the old adage of being firm, fair, and consistent," writes her admiring principal. "She embraces and expresses her passion for teaching."



William Morejon

Centinela Valley Union High School District
Hawthorne High School—AVID/Integrated Math/AP Calculus

City of Residence: Hawthorne

Years Teaching: 9

As a math and AP Calculus teacher, William is familiar with students who say, "When will I ever need this?" But he also prizes former students who say, "I wish I'd paid more attention." His goal is to expose youth to the beauties of STEM education.

Quote of Note:

High praise from a former student: "Reaching out to Mr. Morejon and joining his class were the best decisions I made in high school. He inspired me to reach my potential."



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Catherine Borek

Compton Unified School District
Dominguez High School—AP English Lit/Drama/AVID

City of Residence: Los Angeles
Years Teaching: 26

Catherine was overjoyed when her drama students were able to return to school and get back on stage, “grappling with real-life issues and speaking from their hearts.” She believes strongly that schools that serve poor children should be the best we have.

Quote of Note:

“You hear the words ‘student’ and ‘teacher’ so many times you become numb,” writes a former student. “But entering Ms. Borek’s classroom, I became a scholar.”



Michelle Ban

El Monte Union High School District
Rosemead High School—Social Science

City of Residence: Alhambra
Years Teaching: 13

The classroom is the place where Michelle feels most comfortable, where she can be the most genuine version of herself. She prides herself on being a person who connects with all students, sharing her life with them and encouraging them to do the same

Quote of Note:

A former student shares his memories: “It’s been my privilege to have been Ms. Ban’s World History student, her teaching assistant, her mentee, and now her colleague.”



Mathew Schick

Glendale Unified School District
Crescenta Valley High School—Instrumental Music/Band & Orchestra

City of Residence: Glendale
Years Teaching: 29

Matt enjoys having wide-eyed 9th-graders sitting next to seasoned 12th-graders in his high school band. This encapsulates what he calls the human aspect of music—“being inclusive to all, while offering hope in an often confusing and divisive world.”

Quote of Note:

A fond recollection from an ex-student: “Even when the rest of school seemed difficult, the hours that I spent in the music classroom with Mr. Schick never felt like work.”



Pamela Edward

Glendora Unified School District
Glendora High School—AP Government & Politics/U.S. History

City of Residence: Glendora
Years Teaching: 32

Pam recalls how Zoom-based classrooms changed the way she connected with her students. She learned to make a greater effort to check in with them, to call on them by name, ask which emoji they were feeling that day, or just how they were doing.

Quote of Note:

A colleague observes, “As department chair, Pam handles different personalities with grace and helps to maintain a standard of excellence across the entire department.”





Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Terri Serey

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District
Orange Grove Middle School—Science/STEAM/Makerspace

City of Residence: La Verne

Years Teaching: 18

To help her STEAM students regain learning lost over the pandemic, Terri and her colleagues started Saturday enrichment classes. They also focus on standards for the academic year ahead to make sure students do well at the next grade level.

Quote of Note:

A student recalls a favorite teacher: "Sadly, although I won't be able to see Mrs. Serey for my high school experience, her teachings will always remain with me."



Bridgette Donald-Blue

Los Angeles Unified School District
Coliseum Street Elementary—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: Hawthorne

Years Teaching: 30

Bridgette deferred law school to fulfill a two-year commitment to Teach for America Corp. A third and fourth year resulted because "something kept calling me back to the classroom." Thirty years later she's still teaching—and wouldn't trade it for anything.

Quote of Note:

"Our son always dreaded math," writes a grateful parent. "But by making the lessons innovative, you not only helped him get good scores but develop a liking for math!"



Meghann Seril

Los Angeles Unified School District
Broadway Elementary School, Venice—Third Grade (Mandarin Dual Program)

City of Residence: Los Angeles

Years Teaching: 14

Coming back to in-person classes after a year of Zooming brought home to Meghann just why she loves teaching. Test scores, standards, and curriculum aside, it's about seeing and connecting with others and helping them realize their full potential.

Quote of Note:

"Meghann's knowledge, experience, and skill-set reach beyond the classroom," writes a close colleague. "She dedicates herself to every venture she sets out to accomplish."



Jason Torres-Rangel

Los Angeles Unified School District
Theodore Roosevelt High School—English/AP English

City of Residence: Los Angeles

Years Teaching: 19

Jason was in his college semester abroad in Kenya when the 9/11 attacks happened. He immediately began building lessons to help the majority-Muslim students process the traumatic event, then realized that teaching was his professional destiny.

Quote of Note:

Heartfelt words from a former student: "Mr. Torres wasn't just an amazing teacher, he was an amazing friend whom I am so grateful to have met in my junior year."



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Teresa Nielsen

Manhattan Beach Unified School District
Mira Costa High School—Honors & AP Chemistry

City of Residence: Manhattan Beach

Years Teaching: 19

Despite her role as teacher, Teresa considers herself an eternal student. Since her subject is chemistry, that means an innate desire to know and understand our natural surroundings, a passion that she strives to communicate every day to her students.

Quote of Note:

"Teresa made a point to stop by my room that first year to see how I was doing," a younger teacher recalls. "I couldn't have dreamed up a better colleague."



Juan Orellana

Mountain View School District
Monte Vista K-8 School—Third Grade

City of Residence: Montebello

Years Teaching: 24

Juan's own experience as an English Language Learner was a key factor in his decision to become a teacher. It gave him a challenge and an opportunity to show other young people that dreams can come true, regardless of the obstacles life places in one's way.

Quote of Note:

A parent volunteer offers unqualified praise: "Mr. Orellana is very dedicated to his work and has earned the love and respect of so many families from Monte Vista School."



Ashley Dimkich

Temple City Unified School District
Emperor Elementary School—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: San Marino

Years Teaching: 9

As a onetime student athlete (team captain for U of Kentucky softball), Ashley loves to motivate her students to find success. Being disciplined and staying committed are two of her keys to success. Two more: Work hard and never give up on your dreams!

Quote of Note:

"Each time we succeed in Miss Dimkich's class," writes a former student, "it gives me and my classmates pride to know we did our best and our best was good enough!"



Paula Bae

William S. Hart Union High School District
William S. Hart High School—Anatomy & Physiology/AP Biology

City of Residence: Canyon Country

Years Teaching: 31

Some of Paula's favorite days as a science teacher are activity days—and especially lab days. On lab days students are able to do science and not just hear about it. They are active and engaged in the learning process and having fun at the same time.

Quote of Note:

"Paula is a champion of all students," writes her superintendent, "from English Learners to Advanced Placement. She works to ensure that all students learn at high levels."



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Zoraida Llorens

Alhambra Unified School District
Garfield School—Second Grade

City of Residence: West Covina
Years Teaching: 16

During a daily period designated for creativity, risk-taking, and development of motor skills, Zoraida's second-graders happily transform into painters, singers, or athletes. Frequent results of these high-spirited lessons are feelings of success and joy.

Quote of Note:

Her principal offers this glowing accolade: "Zoraida Llorens is the teacher every school needs, every student deserves, and Garfield is forever grateful to have."



Donald Young

Arcadia Unified School District
Foothill Middle School—Video Production/AVID/Physical Education

City of Residence: Temple City
Years Teaching: 22

Don takes pride in developing authentic, lifelong relationships with his students. One of the things that makes him the proudest is when former students come back as adults to talk to his current students about their personal academic journeys and careers.

Quote of Note:

"For me, Mr. Young is an inspiration," writes a former student, "and though I don't think I'll ever grow out of calling him 'Mr. Young,' he's become one of my greatest friends."



Kathy Sahagian

Azusa Unified School District
Ellington Elementary School—Kindergarten/First Grade

City of Residence: La Verne
Years Teaching: 35

"The day I stop learning," Kathy maintains, "is the day I stop teaching." Thirty-five years into her chosen profession, her learning journey continues. On her own initiative, she created a thousand-volume sharing library for her kindergartners and first-graders.

Quote of Note:

A grateful mother writes, "After more than a year of virtual learning, my daughter walked into her elementary class ready to learn thanks to Mrs. Sahagian's great teaching."



Margarita Berdeja

Baldwin Park Unified School District
Kenmore Elementary School—Second Grade

City of Residence: Rancho Cucamonga
Years Teaching: 31

Margarita's second-graders were ready for classroom learning this year because of the commitment their teachers had previously made to solve the unique problems of distance learning. Her students ended the term eager for academic challenges ahead.

Quote of Note:

Praise from grateful parents: "My daughter had to miss three weeks of school due to COVID, and Mrs. Berdeja reached out multiple times to check on her well-being."

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Kevin Tunnell

Bassett Unified School District
Torch Middle School—Language Arts & Social Studies

City of Residence: Fontana
Years Teaching: 22

Kevin subscribes to the idea that “every child can learn,” but with the caveat, “at their own pace and in their own distinct way.” He feels it’s up to the teacher to discern each student’s strengths and learning style while making them feel at home in the classroom.

Quote of Note:

A former student recalls, “Looking back, I have to credit Mr. Tunnell for creating a comfortable and respectful learning environment for me and my classmates.”



Joy Robles

Bellflower Unified School District
Stephen Foster Elementary—Instructional Specialist

City of Residence: La Mirada
Years Teaching: 19

Following eight years in a fifth-grade classroom, Joy has now spent a full decade in the role of instructional specialist. In whatever capacity, she embraces her chosen profession as absolutely essential for its lasting impact on the lives of students.

Quote of Note:

A former colleague shares a fond recollection: “Joy was always generous with her time and amazing classroom expertise, always eager to assist a fellow teacher.”



Lisa Fuentez

Burbank Unified School District
McKinley Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Burbank
Years Teaching: 10

Culturally integrated lessons and events are important in Lisa’s teaching. They reinforce her belief that all students deserve access to multicultural education in the classroom and schoolwide in which their lives are represented and respected.

Quote of Note:

A grateful colleague writes: “Lisa’s many hours of guidance and encouragement led to my own later successes in teaching—and to my students’ successes.”



Kristen McGaffee

Castaic Union School District
Castaic Elementary School—Kindergarten & First Grade

City of Residence: Valencia
Years Teaching: 20

After 9/11 Kristen was hired to teach a “K/1 split” because classes were too full. Twenty years later she has just finished teaching her second K/1 split and reports proudly that classroom visitors this year couldn’t tell her kindergartners and first graders apart.

Quote of Note:

A parent volunteer writes: “Mrs. McGaffee has an amazing ability to reach students with different learning styles and make sure all are engaged and having fun with learning.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Lorraine Brown

Claremont Unified School District
Oakmont Outdoor School—Transitional Kindergarten

City of Residence: San Dimas
Years Teaching: 25

Lorrie has not only taught Kindergarten, Transitional Kindergarten and TK/K combo classes for 25 years, but, according to her colleagues, has done so with innovation and an ability to keep ahead of the ever-changing needs of her district's youngest students.

Quote of Note:

"When there was a lack of established curriculum for our youngest learners," an administrator notes, "Lorrie led her colleagues in developing and implementing it."



Julie Calderwood

Covina-Valley Unified School District
Covina-Valley Children's Center—Pre-K Deaf & Hard of Hearing

City of Residence: Covina
Years Teaching: 26

Recent technological advancements for children who are deaf and hard of hearing have allowed specialist teachers like Julie to work with them at a much younger age, which helps these children achieve learning milestones abreast of their hearing peers.

Quote of Note:

An ex-student offers this eloquent and heartfelt tribute: "I was a student in Mrs. Julie's class when I was little. I wish she could be my teacher forever. She is the best."



Robyn Johnson

Culver City Unified School District
Farragut Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Culver City
Years Teaching: 15

As a Culver City resident whose two children attended the city's schools, Robyn enjoys being a Kindergarten teacher with her local district. She also enjoys the opportunity to use her professional expertise in balanced literacy and differentiated learning strategies.

Quote of Note:

"Besides serving on our School Leadership team," notes an administrator, "Robyn has volunteered as a teacher rep with our PTA and worked as an English Language tutor."



Tawnya Lichtman

Duarte Unified School District
Maxwell Academy (an IBW School)—Third Grade

City of Residence: Monrovia
Years Teaching: 16

While Tawnya's teaching practices have evolved over time with her growth as an educator, she remains steadfast in her expectations that she and her third-graders will learn together—and steadfast, too, in her commitment to their diverse learning needs.

Quote of Note:

"You can always find Ms. Lichtman after school," a mother recalls, "with her door open, helping students complete their work and speaking with parents about their concerns."

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Andrew Sansone

East Whittier City School District
East Whittier Middle School—Science & STEM Elective

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 17

Middle school students in Andrew's STEM elective classes are tasked with solving problems through the application of science. Or, as some prefer to put it, Mr. Sansone's classes are the ones "where you get to launch rockets and light things on fire."

Quote of Note:

"By teaching students to think critically and evaluate evidence," a fellow teacher writes, "Andrew attempts to equip them to tackle any challenges they face in their lives."



Elizabeth Torres

El Monte City School District
Portrero School—8th Grade Math/AVID

City of Residence: La Puente

Years Teaching: 18

Like other math teachers, Elizabeth gets the frequent question, "Why do we need to learn math?" Her answer is always the same—"To exercise the brain." Which, she adds, will help them think faster and clearer and problem-solve in their everyday lives.

Quote of Note:

High praise from a colleague: "During the 2020-21 school year, the most difficult of most teachers' lives, Elizabeth rose to the challenge and became our fearless leader."



Phuong Pham Uzoff

El Segundo Unified School District
Richmond Street Elementary School—STEAM

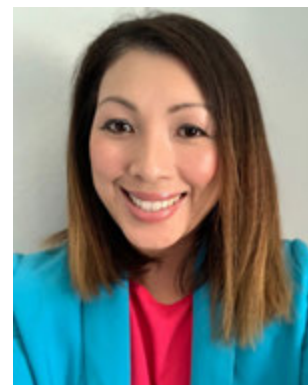
City of Residence: Torrance

Years Teaching: 15

Dr. Uzoff's daily challenge is to teach K-5 students to solve engineering design problems. It's perfectly okay to start over if their individual or team ideas don't work the first or even second time, she explains to them, because "engineering is a process."

Quote of Note:

"I appreciate how Dr. Uzoff goes above and beyond for our students," writes an admiring colleague. "She gets to know their interests and believes in their abilities."



Hyunsoo An

Inglewood Unified School District
Oak Street TK-8 School—6th-8th Math/Science/Art

City of Residence: Los Angeles

Years Teaching: 20

Hyunsoo believes that facing adversities, as so many of her students do, should not undermine the quality of their education, nor should it deprive them of any opportunities. She strives to make a difference by preparing them with rigorous academic instructions.

Quote of Note:

An administrator praises Hyunsoo for "the way she always places the highest standards possible not only on her students but on herself as an instructional leader."



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Lindsay Staley

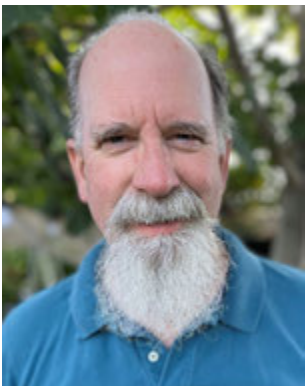
La Canada Unified School District
La Canada High School—Educational Technology

City of Residence: Pasadena
Years Teaching: 17

During her 17-year educational career, Lindsay has taught English in every grade from fifth onward. But for the past eight years her special assignment has been mentoring her colleagues as well as guiding students in the use of educational technology.

Quote of Note:

According to this appreciative colleague, “Lindsay delivers professional development in a way that boosts our confidence, technical ability, and instructional practices.”



Christopher Becker

Lancaster School District
Amargosa Creek Middle School—Social Studies

City of Residence: Lancaster
Years Teaching: 25

Chris doesn't just teach world and U.S. history, he lives it. He has a classroom full of historical artifacts and often wears period costumes. “I've been fortunate to work with the greatest people on the planet,” he insists, “and the adults I work with are great, too!”

Quote of Note:

An administrator notes Christopher's effect on his colleagues: “He and his fellow teachers constantly buoy each other up and help build up our student population.”



Julie Stiteler

Las Virgenes Unified School District
Round Meadow Elementary School—TK-3rd Special Education

City of Residence: Simi Valley
Years Teaching: 15

Julie found her passion for teaching—and specifically for teaching special ed—by caring for a niece born legally blind. It's crucial for her that students feel like important members of the school community and grow into the best version of themselves.

Quote of Note:

“She is admired by students, families, and colleagues,” writes an admiring paraeducator. “No matter how difficult the request is, Julie will jump in and get it done.”



Maria Saldaña

Lennox School District
Lennox Middle School—English Language Arts

City of Residence: Hawthorne
Years Teaching: 28

Maria has a passionate devotion to reading and literature. Over her 28-year teaching career (all at the same school), she has supported and influenced countless students (many of them English Language Learners) to become lifelong readers.

Quote of Note:

An appreciative observation from a fellow teacher: “Ms. Saldaña not only sets high expectations for her students, but then is prepared to go the extra mile for them.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Gicela Segura

Little Lake City School District
Lakeland Elementary School—Teacher on Special Assignment

City of Residence: La Habra

Years Teaching: 18

After years teaching in multiple-subject classrooms for grades 3 through 5, Gicela has embraced her new special assignment as teacher and mentor. She enjoys cheering and coaching both students and colleagues through all their school-related experiences.

Quote of Note:

"As a Teacher on Special Assignment," notes an administrator, "Ms. Segura continues her mission of supporting teachers and students, her school, and her community."



Lee Underwood

Long Beach Unified School District
Millikan High School—AP English Language & Composition

City of Residence: Lakewood

Years Teaching: 16

Lee co-directs the AP Summer Institute at Oxford University, England, sharing his passion for literature with other teachers. He sees the literature classroom as a safe harbor from which students can embark on the adventures of their young adult lives.

Quote of Note:

"Coming from a family of teachers," a colleague observes, "Lee had an early introduction to his life's work—teaching himself and others to read seriously."



Diashawn Banks

Los Angeles County Office of Education
Barry J. Nidorf—English/Social Studies

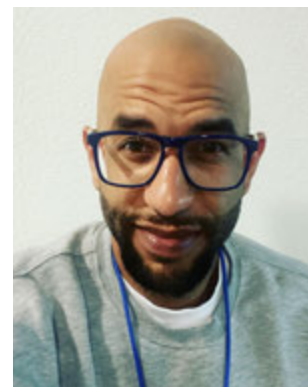
City of Residence: Santa Clarita

Years Teaching: 15

From his first moments as a teacher, Diashawn knew this was his God-given talent. Happily, his students agreed! For the County Office of Education, he has since applied his classroom skills in a variety of settings, including juvenile camp schools.

Quote of Note:

Typical quotes from Diashawn's ex-students: "I've never had a young black male teacher before" and "I've never had the material taught to me in such a fun way."



Joanne Bluman

Los Angeles Unified School District
Chatsworth Charter High School—Social Studies

City of Residence: West Hills

Years Teaching: 29

Many of Joanne's history students returned from the pandemic with gaps in both skills and knowledge. Her adjustment was to slow down, reteach, and realize there's nothing wrong with that. More students came for after-school help, some for companionship.

Quote of Note:

An administrator offers unqualified praise: "Mrs. Bluman is a natural leader and is appreciated by the faculty, staff, parents, and students at Chatsworth Charter High."



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23



James Ng

Los Angeles Unified School District
Hilda Solis Learning Academy—Teacher Librarian/Media Arts
City of Residence: Hacienda Heights
Years Teaching: 15

Like many teachers post-Covid, James was given one overriding imperative—“to do whatever it takes” to address student achievement. Knowing teachers are the best chance for our children’s success, he stepped in to help in every way he could.

Quote of Note:

An unforgettable endorsement from a colleague: “James Ng’s dedication to his students’ mental health and wellness has saved lives inside his classroom and beyond.”



Stacy Kolumbic

Los Nietos School District
Los Nietos Middle School—Language Arts/History
City of Residence: Lakewood
Years Teaching: 16

Beyond her eighth-grade classroom, Stacy loves the community that her middle school encompasses and makes a point of participating in various local activities. Her approach to teaching is to strike a daily balance between the routine and the diverse.

Quote of Note:

An appreciative parent comments, “Stacy goes above and beyond to support her students while encouraging them to develop and maintain high standards.”



Cynthia Aldana

Lynwood Unified School District
Lincoln Elementary School—Kindergarten
City of Residence: South Gate
Years Teaching: 19

Cynthia believes that students deserve to be seen and understood in the classroom as well as to be challenged—even in her kindergarten classroom. Teachers, too, face challenging moments every day and should strive to make them teachable moments.

Quote of Note:

“Cynthia shows all of us, her peers, how to be our best selves for our students,” writes an admiring colleague. “She always has a smile on her face and a warm demeanor.”



Maria Lomelin

Monrovia Unified School District
Wild Rose School of Creative Arts—Third Grade
City of Residence: Monrovia
Years Teaching: 21

While working as an instructional assistant at age 20, Maria discovered that teaching came naturally, time went quickly and, more importantly, she felt joy in that environment. It wasn’t long until she couldn’t imagine pursuing any other career.

Quote of Note:

An administrator celebrates her infectious optimism and positive spirit: “Maria is often heard saying, ‘It will be great!’ even in the most challenging of situations.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Bertha Quiroz

Montebello Unified School District
Winter Gardens Elementary School—First Grade

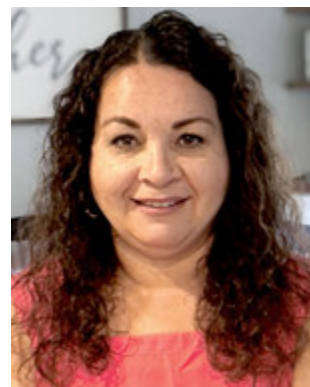
City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 19

As an English Learner herself, and the first in her family to go to college, Bertha can strongly identify with the first-graders in her dual immersion classes. In fact, her desire to make a positive difference in young lives motivated her to become an educator.

Quote of Note:

"To walk into Bertha's first-grade classroom is to see the fruit of her long hours of expert planning and preparation," a colleague notes. "Everything is ready for her students."



Taina Divine

Norwalk La Mirada Unified School District
Benton Middle School Visual & Performing Arts Magnet—Resource Specialist

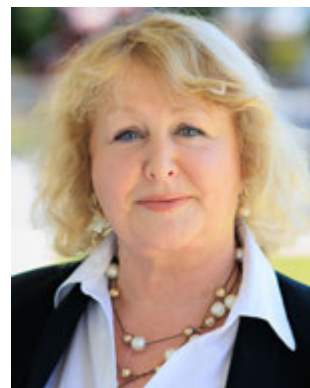
City of Residence: La Mirada

Years Teaching: 17

Taina keeps in close communication with the parents of her special needs students. She works to ensure that they are all given every opportunity not only to grow academically and developmentally, but to express themselves in the arts.

Quote of Note:

An administrator comments, "Ms. Divine is a leader among her peers who has served in a variety of leadership capacities and works tirelessly to support our school's mission."



Gabriel Gonzales

Palmdale School District
Oak Tree Community Day School—Seventh-Eighth Grades

City of Residence: Palmdale

Years Teaching: 19

Gabriel teaches at an alternative high school that serves as a safe learning environment for students who've been expelled or have behavior issues. He seeks to find ways to build confidence in those with little hope or self-belief that they can ever be successful.

Quote of Note:

"Mr. Gonzales is a born leader, mentor, and motivator," writes a fellow teacher. "I appreciate his focus, energy, and love for the profession and the community."



Hassan Twiet

Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District
Palos Verdes Peninsula High School—Science/Engineering & Robotics

City of Residence: Anaheim

Years Teaching: 23

Hassan's students regularly place in state and national competitions in the area of aeronautics and robotics. He not only teaches a full schedule at the district's largest high school, but guides the after-school award-winning academic competition teams.

Quote of Note:

A colleague writes: "Meeting industry leaders gives Hassan's students a significant edge as they enter college and, eventually, careers in the aerospace industry."



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Mickie Hazlewood

Paramount Unified School District
Abraham Lincoln Elementary School—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: Lakewood
Years Teaching: 25

Mickie is happily living out her childhood dream to be a teacher—and has done so in her district at every grade level from K-5 for the past 25 years. Among the lessons she has learned over this span is that every child constitutes a unique gift to the world.

Quote of Note:

Complimentary words from a fellow teacher: “Ms. Hazlewood is at the forefront of adapting technology and innovation to meet the complex needs of today’s students.”



Bharat Parekh

Pasadena Unified School District
John Muir High School—Mathematics

City of Residence: Monrovia
Years Teaching: 15

A work background as a tradesman and businessman before becoming a teacher lets Bharat share with his students the plus points of other professions. He works to merge the theoretical aspects of textbooks with the practical aspects of real-world situations.

Quote of Note:

Well-deserved praise from an accomplished former student: “Mr. Parekh demands students put forth their best efforts, but they know he does so because he cares.”



Wendy Trento

Pomona Unified School District
Decker Elementary School—Sixth Grade

City of Residence: La Verne
Years Teaching: 24

Over the last two decades Wendy has fallen in love with the art of teaching “bright-eyed 11- and 12-year-olds.” Every day is filled with rewards of seeing students progress both academically and socially. In short, she says, she was “born to be a classroom teacher.”

Quote of Note:

Her school principal obviously agrees: “Wendy’s enthusiasm for education and for children makes her the type of teacher that you remember for the rest of her life.”



Casey Waddell

Redondo Beach Unified School District
Parras Middle School—Math

City of Residence: Redondo Beach
Years Teaching: 15

As leader of her middle school’s math department, Casey encourages schoolwide collaboration in order to create common assessments and strategies for improving. After school she can usually be found coaching volleyball or tutoring at-risk students.

Quote of Note:

“Casey brings people together,” notes an administrator, “both students and staff, by encouraging them and motivating them to be the best version of themselves.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Victoria Pinedo

Rosemead School District
Janson Elementary School—Fourth Grade

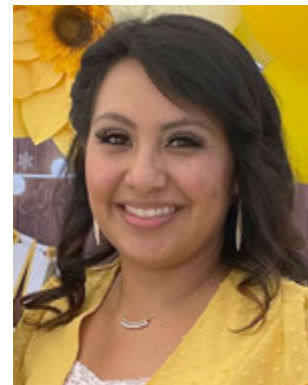
City of Residence: La Puente

Years Teaching: 5

In addition to teaching fourth grade, Victoria is called upon to care for all the students at Janson Elementary in her role as academic advisor. This involves meeting with her principal, teachers, and parents to devise plans to best support each individual student.

Quote of Note:

Heartfelt words from an admiring colleague: "It is very evident that Victoria loves her students through the kindness, patience, and care that she shows them all."



Deloras Skokan

Rowland Unified School District
Northam Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Chino

Years Teaching: 14

Who inspired Deloras to become a teacher? First, a lovely and kind kindergarten teacher. Then a fourth-grade teacher who read books aloud with enthusiasm. And, finally, her parents, who said, "If you're going to do something, always do it right!"

Quote of Note:

A mother's gratitude for a very special teacher: "My daughter has developed a love of reading and writing ever since being taught by Mrs. Skokan in first grade."



Matthew Mizrahi

San Marino Unified School District
San Marino High School—English

City of Residence: Alhambra

Years Teaching: 5

In his short time at San Marino High School, Matthew has already been honored by students with an Award for Excellence in Teaching. His motivation is simple: To inspire young people with his own abiding love for English language and literature.

Quote of Note:

An ex-student offers this eloquent testimony: "Mr. Mizrahi's enthusiasm has reignited my passion for English, and I believe his teaching should be recognized."



Christina Bakoo

Saugus Union School District
North Park Elementary School—Fourth-Sixth Grades

City of Residence: Santa Clarita

Years Teaching: 25

Looking back on the pandemic, Christina reflects, "Although Distance Learning was challenging, I wanted us to focus on what we were gaining rather than missing. It was an opportunity to develop innovative ways to learn and strategies to teach."

Quote of Note:

"Thank you for changing my life in more ways than one," writes a grateful former student, "and know whoever has the gift of being in your class is a very lucky person!"



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Sarit Swanborn

South Pasadena Unified School District
South Pasadena Unified School District—Visual Arts for Elementary Schools

City of Residence: South Pasadena

Years Teaching: 9

Sarit has taken to heart the message of veteran teacher Rita Pierson, “that every child deserves a champion, someone who believes in them against all odds and will cheer them forward, leaving a legacy of resilience, admiration, and mutual respect.”

Quote of Note:

A PTA president clearly holds her in awe: “Sarit works tirelessly, at three different schools and seven different grade levels with more than 700 students each semester.”



Silvia Bobluk

South Whittier School District
Carmela Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Hacienda Heights

Years Teaching: 34

Some things first-graders learn in Silvia's class: Math is essential, and numbers are fun. Letters and sounds can be tricky at first, but when mastered they are the key that opens a magical world of fantasy and imagination beyond your wildest dreams.

Quote of Note:

“Silvia makes teaching look so effortless!” notes a former colleague. “There are so many captivating tricks in her teacher's bag, which she generously shares with her peers.”



Katie Doupe

Torrance Unified School District
North High School—AP Biology & Chemistry

City of Residence: Torrance

Years Teaching: 15

Katie's career path began in her 7th-grade teacher's classroom doing homework over lunch. Soon she was informally helping friends with math under that teacher's watchful eye. After more tutoring followed in high school and college, Katie was hooked for life.

Quote of Note:

Extravagant praise from her district superintendent: “Mrs. Doupe is a lifelong learner, always pushing herself, her colleagues, and our district to new heights.”



Raelene Waddell

Walnut Valley Unified School District
Westhoff Elementary—Second Grade

City of Residence: Glendora

Years Teaching: 38

As a veteran teacher (38 years in the classroom), Raelene has a queen-size bag of tools at her disposal. When newer teachers ask for guidance, she offers a listening ear, good advice, brainstorms a few suggestions, then helps them come up with solutions.

Quote of Note:

A student remembers fondly: “Ms. Waddell would spend her own money on prizes just so we could spend our earned ‘Adventure Bucks’ on supplies we'd need for writing.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23

Katie Burnett

West Covina Unified School District
Edgewood High School—English I Honors & Theory of Knowledge

City of Residence: Brea

Years Teaching: 21

Katie's lesson plans can be very challenging. She's convinced that students of all backgrounds and abilities need to be challenged and supported to meet those challenges. Otherwise, they may shy away from opportunities for vital growth.

Quote of Note:

"In my 20 years in education, I can attest that Katherine ranks atop all others that I've had the opportunity to work with and learn from."—An administrator's accolade



Jennifer de Moor

Westside Union School District
Leona Valley Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Lancaster

Years Teaching: 26

As a first-grade teacher, Jen feels honored to build the foundation for her students' education. Her commitment, year after year, is to listen to them, acknowledge their needs, and continue to be there for them long after they leave her classroom.

Quote of Note:

An ex-student recalls: "Mrs. de Moor saw my love for archeology at a young age and encouraged it by letting me go visit another teacher who was a former archeologist."



Aaron De La Torre

Whittier City School District
Daniel Phelan Language Academy—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 14

Aaron is committed to creating a safe and connected environment for his fifth-grade students. In that safe environment he strives to consider all learners, provide them choices, plan authentic experiences, and encourage collaboration and creativity.

Quote of Note:

A fellow teacher credits Aaron for instilling a sense of family among his students. "He always emphasizes how proud he is to be part of this school and this community."



Mary Ann Fajardo

Whittier Union High School District
Frontier High School—World History/U.S. History/Ethnic Studies

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 12

Mary Ann teaches history at a continuation high school whose students were unable to qualify for a comprehensive high school. Knowing students are harder to reach when they feel defeated, she strives for a positive, energetic environment in her classroom.

Quote of Note:

From a grateful former student: "I wouldn't be graduating today if it weren't for your wise words and daily motivation. I have the utmost respect and love for you as well."



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2022-23



Rachelle Briggs

Wilsona School District
Vista San Gabriel Elementary—First Grade

City of Residence: Palmdale
Years Teaching: 17 years

Rachelle's educational career path has been roundabout. After starting as a substitute, she went on to spend four years in speech pathology. For the last six years she's found her way back "home" to the classroom as a beloved first-grade teacher.

Quote of Note:

An appreciative colleague writes, "Ms. Briggs' broad experience in education makes her a valuable member of Vista San Gabriel Elementary and of our small rural community."



Erin Henn

Wiseburn Unified School District
Juan Cabrillo Elementary School—TK-2 Special Day Class

City of Residence: Hawthorne
Years Teaching: 16

With 16 years' experience in special education, Erin devotes each day to teaching special needs students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities. In addition to core subjects, her TK-to-second-graders are mainstreamed for a portion of each day.

Quote of Note:

Praise from a fellow teacher: "I can't help but admire Erin's strength and dedication in taking under her wing children suffering from such a wide range of disabilities."

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