

In Honor of Teaching Achievement



Los Angeles County **TEACHERS** of the **YEAR** **2024-25**

Agenda

- 10:00 a.m. Arrival and Check-In / Open Reception
- 11:00 a.m. Opening Ceremony
Welcoming Remarks:
Superintendent Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Adhirat Ajani, Middle College HS Senior
Master of Ceremonies:
Elizabeth Graswich, Ed.D., Executive Director of Public
Affairs and Communications, LACOE
- 11:10 a.m. California TOY Speeches:
Hannah Rodriguez, Duarte USD
Drew Lewis, LAUSD
Casey Cuny (National Nominee), William S. Hart UHSD
- 11:20 a.m. Presentation of the 16 County Teachers of the Year
- 12:15 p.m. Lunch**
- 1:15 p.m. Presentation of the 53 District Teachers of the Year
- 2:15 p.m. Door Prizes and Grand Prize
- 2:20 p.m. Adjourn

Announcement and Awards Luncheon **Friday, September 20, 2024** **Hilton Universal City and Towers**

The 2024-25 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 69 district-level Teacher-of-the-Year representatives.

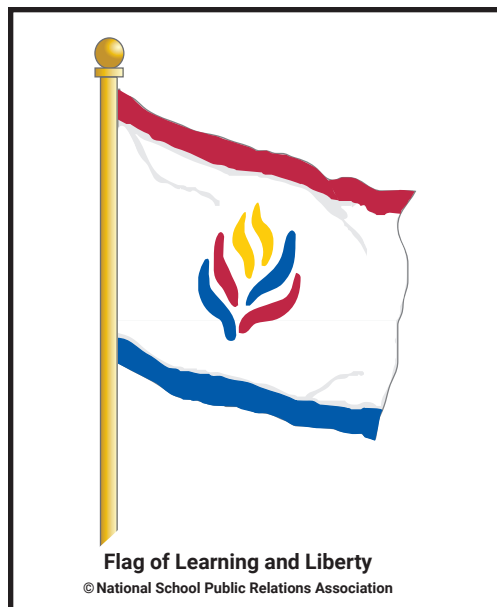
County – State

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 23 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.

“Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.”

—John Steinbeck

California Teachers of the Year

Since our program began in 1983, 49 Los Angeles County teachers have gone on to be selected as California Teachers of the Year:

1985	Evaline Khayat Kruse, LAUSD	2009	Jose Navarro IV, LAUSD
1987	Shirley Rosenkranz, Temple City USD	2011	Beverly Gonzalez, Baldwin Park USD
1988	Lorna Mae Nagata, Alhambra SD	2012	Florence Avognon, LACOE Ken LaVigne, Whittier UHSD Rebecca Mieliwocki, Burbank USD (<i>National Teacher of the Year</i>)
1993	Patricia Baltz, Arcadia USD (<i>State National Nominee</i>) Edward Riegler, Alhambra SD	2013	Veronica Marquez, LAUSD
1994	Beth Cassford, Little Lake City SD	2014	Michael Hayden, Manhattan Beach USD
1995	Richard Chapleau, Antelope Valley UHSD (<i>State National Nominee</i>) Rhoda Paulette Coleman, Lennox SD	2015	Maggie Mabery, Manhattan Beach USD (<i>State National Nominee</i>) Lovelyn Marquez-Prueher, LAUSD
1996	Cedric Anderson, LACOE Sandy Fleishman, Las Virgenes USD Javier Gonzalez, Whittier UHSD (<i>State National Nominee</i>)	2016	Daniel Jocz, LAUSD (<i>State National Nominee</i>)
1997	Carole Firestone, Las Virgenes USD	2017	Isela Lieber, LAUSD
1998	Linwood C. Thompson, Bellflower USD	2018	Kirsten Farrell, LAUSD Erin Oxhorn-Gilpin, Castaic Union SD
1999	Ingrid Boydston, Saugus Union SD	2019	Michael Henges, Redondo Beach USD Kimberlee Holz, Manhattan Beach USD
2000	Marilyn Whirry, Manhattan Beach USD (<i>National Teacher of the Year</i>)	2021	Jim Klipfel, William S. Hart UHSD (<i>State National Nominee</i>)
2001	Adele Prince, Glendora USD	2022	Virginia Vasquez, Alhambra USD
2002	Mary Eileen Geer, West Covina USD	2023	Catherine Borek, Compton USD Bridgette Donald-Blue, LAUSD Jason Torres-Rangel, LAUSD (<i>State National Nominee</i>)
2004	Paul McLaughlin, Walnut Valley USD	2024	Hannah Rodriguez, Duarte USD Drew Lewis, LAUSD Casey Cuny, William S. Hart UHSD (<i>State National Nominee</i>)
2005	Kim Labinger, Glendale USD		
2006	Denis Cruz, Whittier City Elementary SD Kelly Jean Hanock, LAUSD		
2007	Dawna Countryman, Saugus Union SD Helen Papadopoulous, Walnut Valley USD Alan Sitomer, Lynwood USD		
2008	Lewis Chappellear, LAUSD (<i>State National Nominee</i>) Michael Allen Long, South Whittier SD		

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 2024-25 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.

Special Thanks



**LACOE Signature Fund @GLA
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Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Los Angeles County
Superintendent of Schools

Welcome to the 2024 Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year Awards Luncheon. It's a joy to be here with you today as we celebrate the extraordinary achievements of our educators across L.A. County.

As the L.A. County Superintendent of Schools, I am excited to host this event that honors the dedication and innovation of teachers throughout L.A. County. Their passion for education and commitment to our students are truly inspiring.

Each Teacher of the Year nominee sets an outstanding example in education. We deeply appreciate their hard work and dedication. Today, we recognize the 16 exceptional educators who have earned the title of Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year and wish them great success as they advance to the state competition.

Let's enjoy today's event and celebrate the significant impact these remarkable teachers have on our students' lives. Congratulations to each of you for this well-earned recognition!

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

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



Stanley L. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D.
Board President
Los Angeles County Board of Education

It gives me great joy to congratulate you on this wonderful achievement and highly coveted distinction. Becoming “Teacher of The Year” is certainly no small feat. It is a testament to all of your hard work, sacrifices and the care that you have for your students and their well-being. I hope you feel honored and valued to be the recipient of this well-deserved recognition.

I am of the opinion that teachers do not receive enough recognition for all of the work that you do—from planning rigorous and relevant instruction, addressing and supporting your students’ social and emotional developmental needs, serving as role models, coaches, mentors, and, for many of you, becoming an extended member of your students’ families. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank you for all of your hard work and dedication to your students and the teaching profession.

I fundamentally believe that teaching is a calling where one has been fortunate to assume a leadership position that prepares students to matriculate successfully into society with relevant critical thinking, problem solving and transferable skills that will allow them to excel and thrive in their lives outside of the classroom.

On behalf of the Los Angeles County Board of Education, I wish you continued success, and I eagerly anticipate hearing more great things about the tremendous impact that you will continue to have on your students. Congratulations and best wishes to you!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stanley L. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D." The signature is fluid and cursive.

Stanley L. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D.
Board President
Los Angeles County Board of Education



A Message From the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

September 20, 2024

Welcome to the 43rd annual Los Angeles County Office of Education Teachers of the Year Awards! Congratulations to all of the outstanding teachers who are being celebrated for excellence in teaching.

Each of today's honorees demonstrates the very best of a profession dedicated to improving and enriching the lives of our children. Their dedication leaves a positive mark on students that follows them beyond the classroom and benefits our local community, state, and nation as they become the leaders of tomorrow.

Nearly everyone would say that a teacher has made a significant impact on their lives, whether by developing their self-worth or helping them discover their passions. Events like today's celebration offer a chance to honor these exceptional individuals, whose dedication and mentorship enable our youth to learn, become more socially conscious, and thrive in a twenty-first-century global economy. Students can take pride in their achievements and cherish the memories of that special teacher who inspired, encouraged, and motivated them to excel both in school and in life.

As we work to highlight the teaching profession and recruit more educators, I encourage all of you to join our efforts. 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.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to the Los Angeles County Office of Education Teachers of the Year, the school and district staff, and the dedicated people who make these ceremonies possible. Thank you for all that you do, and please accept my best wishes for a wonderful event.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Thurmond". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Nadine Page Phillips

Alhambra Unified School District
Mark Keppel High School—Drama and Theater

City of Residence: South Pasadena
Years Teaching: 25

For Nadine an important part of her performance-based classes, whether in class discussions or on the stage, is connecting theater to real-world situations. This involves critical thinking, asking questions and sharing opinions to raise the level of debate.

Quote of Note:

“Ms. Phillips successfully works with a diverse group of students of varying ability levels,” notes her principal. “Students from all areas of the school request her classes.”



Courtney Franz

Arcadia Unified School District
Holly Avenue Elementary School—TK-5th Special Education

City of Residence: Duarte
Years Teaching: 20

Courtney will always remember when, on the last day of the school year, one of her fourth-grade special education students gave her a sweet goodbye, saying “I can’t wait until next year!” before he walked out of the gate toward his mom’s car.

Quote of Note:

A grateful parent writes, “Rather than a stock answer, Ms. Franz would always give us thoughtful and honest responses about our son, which invited ongoing dialogue.”



Jesse Braun

Beverly Hills Unified School District
Beverly Vista Middle School—Library Media/Yearbook/Home Hospital

City of Residence: Santa Monica
Years Teaching: 27

As a teacher librarian, Jesse not only teaches basic digital and information literacy, but strives to make his library shelves an inclusive space that provides diverse books and other resources to serve the widely diverse students who step through its doors.

Quote of Note:

According to these eloquent and appreciative parents, “Mr. Braun is an amazing role model and multi-tasking educational rock star who lives to inspire and encourage.”



Theresa Vargas

Burbank Unified School District
Dolores Huerta Middle School—English Language Development

City of Residence: Burbank
Years Teaching: 33

Teri began the year teaching six middle school ELD periods a day, with students speaking 12 different languages. She was tempted to throw her hands up in frustration, but, relying on experience, passion and perseverance, met all these challenges head-on.

Quote of Note:

A colleague offers moving testimony: “Through Teri’s leadership, I found the courage to speak up for what I believe and developed a greater sense of purpose as an educator.”



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Justin Smith

Centinela Valley Union High School District
Leuzinger High School—English/AP Literature and Composition
City of Residence: Long Beach
Years Teaching: 11

After logging more than 1,700 volunteer hours with AmeriCorps in the Pacific Northwest, Justin knew he could make it in L.A. as a teacher. These days he delights in taking his AP language students snorkeling, kayaking, and even snowshoeing in Yosemite.

Quote of Note:

High praise courtesy of an ex-student: “Mr. Smith combines his one-of-a-kind teaching skills with a vibrant personality, making his classroom a place of excitement.”



Lisa Hatfield

Las Virgenes Unified School District
Arthur E. Wright Middle School—Social Studies
City of Residence: Calabasas
Years Teaching: 35

A prime goal for Lisa throughout her 35 years of teaching social studies has been to send students off to the next grade level excited to learn what’s next—and also, at that next level, to be able to employ the skills that they have learned with her.

Quote of Note:

Praise from a longtime colleague: “Lisa’s leadership in the integration of artificial technology in the classroom is a testament to her commitment to her students.”



Erica Rood Lundy

Los Angeles Unified School District
Welby Way Charter Elementary School—5th Grade Gifted
City of Residence: Woodland Hills
Years Teaching: 16

Erica strives to make her fifth-grade “gifted” classroom a colorful, collaborative space, one where all students feel safe, where silliness is welcomed and where expectations are high.

Quote of Note:

“This was my last year in elementary school,” writes a former fifth-grader, “and it’s wonderful that I got to have Mrs. Lundy as my last elementary school teacher.”



Nicholas Westfall

Los Angeles Unified School District
Alexander Hamilton Senior High School—Physical Education
City of Residence: Santa Monica
Years Teaching: 13

As a boy, Nick asked his dad what he should be when he grew up. His dad said that if he could go back, he’d be a PE teacher so he could wear basketball shorts all day and teach kids how to play sports. Nick would find out there’s a lot more to PE than that.

Quote of Note:

A former student recalls that “Mr. Westfall’s yoga class stressed that we don’t only focus on the wellness of ourselves, but the wellness of the community as a whole.”





Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Arby Jean Wolkov

Los Angeles Unified School District
William Howard Taft Charter High School—American Sign Language

City of Residence: Burbank
Years Teaching: 12

The ringing bell is the last sound to be heard in the classroom before the students of American Sign Language are greeted silently with the signs for “Good morning!” After they all sign back, it’s time for another morning of sign language with Mrs. Wolkov.

Quote of Note:

A fellow teacher observes, “I have witnessed Mrs. Wolkov’s ASL students flourish through her Silent Weekend events via team-building activities and social interaction.”



Matthew Winheim

Palmdale School District
Space Aeronautics Gateway to Exploration Magnet Academy—Aviation/Drones/Math

City of Residence: Palmdale
Years Teaching: 8

When people ask Matthew why he’s still in his classroom at night, or what motivates him, he tells them that he expects his aviation STEM students to be ready to learn, and that they expect him to be ready to teach them always with his “A-game.”

Quote of Note:

An administrator notes, “Mr. Winheim’s passion for mathematics education helped him become district coordinator for STEAM education, a position he held for five years.”



Paula Martinez

Rowland Unified School District
Telesis Academy of Science and Math—U.S. History/English/Debate

City of Residence: Walnut
Years Teaching: 26

Challenging topics of conversation arise within the U.S. history curriculum, and in Paula’s middle school classroom. She is delighted to witness the empathy and adroitness with which her students contemplate and discuss these important issues.

Quote of Note:

According to a district administrator, “Paula’s students speak of how she makes history come to life then supports them as they work together to strengthen their reading skills.”



Flor de Maria Garcia

South Whittier School District
Loma Vista Elementary School—Sixth Grade

City of Residence: Whittier
Years Teaching: 8

Flor believes in making learning memorable. She once went so far as to bring a rabbit and a pig to class in order to help her eighth-graders engage in a fun and creative classroom discussion comparing and contrasting the two animals.

Quote of Note:

“As a teacher leader,” notes an administrator, “Flor serves as a mentor and advocate for students, inspiring her colleagues to strive for excellence in their own practices.”



Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Nicolle Fazis

Torrance Unified School District
J. H. Hull Middle School—Algebra 1 and Study Skills
City of Residence: Torrance
Years Teaching: 20

In college Nicolle thought about what career she could see herself doing daily that would bring her joy. Her answer came as she recalled her kindergarten self, setting up her stuffed animals as students and using her letter books to teach her “class.”

Quote of Note:

Inspiring words from an ex-student: “Ms. Fazis fanned the flames of my love for math, and I don’t think I would be where I am without her enthusiasm and generosity.”



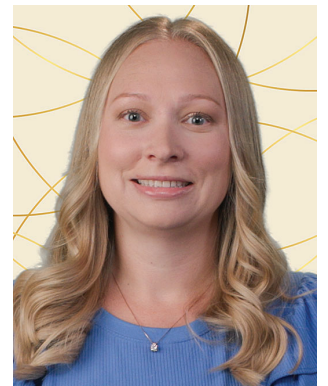
Lisa Walker

Westside Union School District
Valley View Elementary School—Kindergarten
City of Residence: Lancaster
Years Teaching: 11

Lisa strives to meet all her kindergartners’ needs based on their varying learning abilities and includes real-life experiences to make content meaningful. While reading a story about bread-making, she had her students bake loaves of artisan bread.

Quote of Note:

Over the years these grateful parents sent four children to Ms. Walker’s kindergarten class: “She will forever be the most impactful teacher in all our kids’ lives!”



Nicole Jolicoeur

William S. Hart Union High School District
Rancho Pico Junior High School—Special Education/Physical Education
City of Residence: Valencia
Years Teaching: 15

It was the resilience, potential and pure joy of special needs students that originally inspired Nicole to enter the field of special education. These same qualities continue to inspire her today to be a part of their educational journey and personal growth.

Quote of Note:

Words of praise and gratitude from the mother of an autistic student: “Mrs. Jolicoeur sees the child before the disability and recognizes all that is wonderful in my son.”



Aiko Anglim

Wiseburn Unified School District
Hollyglen & Del Aire Elementary Schools—TK-Second Grade/Music
City of Residence: Torrance
Years Teaching: 16

Coming to America from Japan at age 6 and speaking no English, Aiko found that music played a huge role in her young life, and music teachers helped shape her as a person. Her goal is to create these same kinds of connections with her own students.

Quote of Note:

An administrator heaps praise on a recent spring music performance: “It truly is incredible what these young students can accomplish under Mrs. Anglim’s guidance.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Michelle Fernandez

Acton Agua Dulce Unified School District
Meadowlark Elementary School—Third Grade

City of Residence: Canyon Country
Years Teaching: 13

Michelle’s professional home, Meadowlark Elementary, is a small rural campus where the community is extremely involved in school and district functions. Over the last nine years, she has taught first-and-second-grade combo classes as well as third grade.

Quote of Note:

A ringing endorsement by a district administrator: “Mrs. Fernandez has shown herself to be a caring and passionate teacher who gives her all every day for her students.”



Ada Martinez

Antelope Valley Union High School District
Antelope Valley High School—Spanish

City of Residence: Lancaster
Years Teaching: 18

Ada endorses her profession to students seeking a calling to pursue. “As a teacher,” she points out, “you can leave a legacy that extends far beyond the classroom.” She considers a teacher’s ability to inspire students to be a “unique superpower.”

Quote of Note:

Commendation from a colleague: “I made sure to attend all her professional development sessions because I always walked away with something ready to apply.”



Griselda Berry

Azusa Unified School District
Gladstone Middle School—Social Studies

City of Residence: La Verne
Years Teaching: 27

Like so many teachers, Griselda believes few professions offer such a profound opportunity to make a lasting impact on society. Teachers do that, she explains, by instilling a love for learning and empowering students to reach their full potential.

Quote of Note:

Her school principal is unstinting in his praise, calling Griselda “one of the best teachers I have supervised in my 20 years as a school site administrator.”



Cynthia Milian

Baldwin Park Unified School District
Ernest R. Geddes Elementary School—Third Grade/Dual Language-Spanish

City of Residence: Fontana
Years Teaching: 19

Cynthia fell in love with teaching while substituting. Specifically, she fell in love with the fact that she could make a difference in a student’s life—students who were just like Cynthia remembers being. She wants each of them to know that she loves them.

Quote of Note:

Her principal notes, “Cynthia’s ability to seamlessly navigate between English and Dual Language instruction has greatly enriched the educational experience of her students.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Eugina Thomas

Bellflower Unified School District
Ramona Elementary School—K-Sixth Grades/AVID/Instructional Specialist
City of Residence: Long Beach
Years Teaching: 11

Growing up as the only black child in many of her schooling experiences taught Eugina the importance of inclusivity. This background also enhances her ability to interact with students of various ages and backgrounds—and especially struggling students.

Quote of Note:

A colleague echoes this sentiment: “Ms. Thomas goes above and beyond in creating an inclusive community where all students feel valued and are given a chance to thrive.”



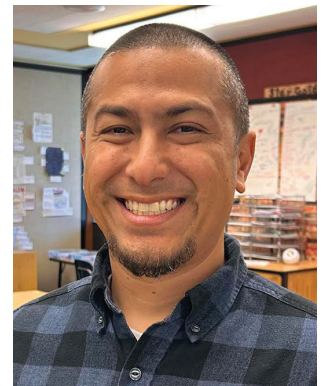
Terry Joseph Parent

Castaic Union School District
Castaic Middle School—English Language Arts/Video Production
City of Residence: Santa Clarita
Years Teaching: 18

In his eighth-grade English Language Arts classes, Terry strives to connect with his students on a personal level in order to foster a love of literature, writing, and creative thinking. He is dedicated to their success not only in the classroom but far beyond.

Quote of Note:

A fellow teacher offers this testimonial: “Every student in Mr. Parent’s classes and across the school district knows that he is a teacher who cares for his students.”



Geoffrey Payton

Claremont Unified School District
El Roble Intermediate School—Science/AVID elective
City of Residence: Rancho Cucamonga
Years Teaching: 12

Geoff works to support his students while maintaining high expectations. But his dedication extends beyond the classroom, participating in shared decision-making groups and influencing his school’s Technology Scope and Sequence Committee.

Quote of Note:

From an admiring colleague: “In his dedicated role in leading the school’s AVID program, Geoff exemplifies what it means to be a transformative educator.”



Kaiyan Wang

Compton Unified School District
Compton High School—Mandarin Chinese/Computer Science/Math
City of Residence: Fullerton
Years Teaching: 9

It was a high school math teacher who changed Kaiyan’s life. His patience, encouragement and teaching style brought her out of defeatism, gave her confidence, and inspired her to become a teacher who helps her students survive and thrive.

Quote of Note:

“I believe she is the most amazing teacher that I have ever had,” writes a grateful former student. “In fact, without her help and concern, I would not have graduated.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Rhondi Bonilla

Covina-Valley Unified School District
Grovecenter Elementary School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Chino
Years Teaching: 32

Her three-plus decades in the classroom have taught Rhondi that when students know you care about them, they will meet your expectations. When they know the teacher has their best interest in mind, they work hard, persevere, and demonstrate true grit.

Quote of Note:

Heartfelt praise from a parent: “Mrs. Bonilla truly sees her students for who they are beyond their struggles. I’m grateful to have been twice blessed with her.”



Haylei Maria Torres-Socarras

Culver City Unified School District
Culver City Middle School—Social Studies

City of Residence: Los Angeles
Years Teaching: 15

Haylei strives to be approachable, to exude love and positivity, and to model enthusiasm for learning to her students. She engages in lively conversations with them on a daily basis, whether in class, in the hallway, or at after-school events.

Quote of Note:

An admiring parent speaks: “Everything about Ms. Torres’ classroom, from her decorations to her well-thought-out lessons, shows her passion for teaching history.”



Alejandro Santos

Downey Unified School District
Sussman Middle School—Math & RSP Math/Flight & Space

City of Residence: Torrance
Years Teaching: 19

As a cross-age tutor while still in high school, Alejandro stepped in to teach Algebra in the teacher’s absence. This experience led to his tutoring of calculus and physics while in college and to his current post-teaching math classes at his middle school.

Quote of Note:

A mother reports how her son became excited by science “in Mr. Santos’ Flight & Space class, where he learned the principles of spaceflight via fun projects and activities.”



Amber Kristine Posner

Duarte Unified School District
Beardslee Dual Language Academy—Third Grade

City of Residence: Diamond Bar
Years Teaching: 23

Amber’s dream of becoming a teacher began in kindergarten. It was there that she first experienced the kind of enthusiasm for learning that she strives to spark in her own students and hopes can be carried forward into future generations.

Quote of Note:

An administrator notes: “Ms. Posner prioritizes creating a safe and nurturing classroom environment where every student feels accepted and valued.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Robyn Blythe

East Whittier City School District
Murphy Ranch Elementary—Third Grade

City of Residence: La Mirada
Years Teaching: 25

A third-grade teacher taught Robyn she was capable of more than she had believed. This gave her confidence to tackle challenges and view setbacks as opportunities for growth. Today she strives to teach those same lessons to her own third-graders.

Quote of Note:

“My youngest daughter was not an avid reader,” notes a thoughtful parent, “but Mrs. Blythe has cultivated in her a strong desire to read both in and outside of class.”



Peter Lam

El Monte City School District
Gidley Elementary School—Math

City of Residence: Irvine
Years Teaching: 24

Peter believes strongly in the transformative power of education—and especially of math education—to lead students to greater opportunities in life. It is this passion to help students succeed that has fueled his 24-year career as a mathematics teacher.

Quote of Note:

A colleague testifies: “There’s almost too much to say about Mr. Lam. He’s a caring person who works overtime for the promotion of every child’s learning experience.”



Sonia Ayala

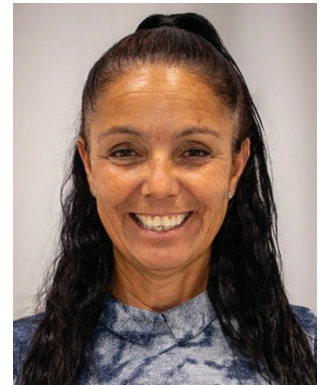
El Monte Union High School District
South El Monte High School—Physical Education

City of Residence: Chino Hills
Years Teaching: 32

Orphaned at an early age and with years in foster care, Sonia found her cornerstone of stability in education. She believes that it can serve the same purpose for her students, a place of stability and support, especially for those from chaotic backgrounds.

Quote of Note:

A student speaks: “Mrs. Ayala is the first trusted adult I have on my mind to speak with whenever I have an issue. She makes time even if it interrupts her busy schedule.”



Arianne Martinez

El Rancho Unified School District
Ruben Salazar High School—Counselor

City of Residence: Pico Rivera
Years Teaching: 21

Inspired by her interactions with students at her continuation high school, Arianne pursued degrees in counseling to broaden her impact on student success. Later she transitioned into the role of academic counselor to better serve at-risk students.

Quote of Note:

A colleague notes, “Arianne has also contributed to adult education at El Rancho as a GED instructor, helping adult learners obtain their High School Equivalency.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Lindsay Sotero

Garvey School District
Roger W. Temple Intermediate School—Physical Education
City of Residence: Cypress
Years Teaching: 17

Even if PE is not a student's favorite class, Lindsay still wants them interested in what they're learning, practicing, or playing each day. Learning kinesthetically through movement, physical activity, and play can supplement what they learn sitting in class.

Quote of Note:

According to a colleague, "Lindsay is one of those teachers we come across once in a great while who is popular not only with students but parents and colleagues as well."



Maria Capdevila-Gutiérrez

Glendale Unified School District
E. J. Toll Middle School—Spanish Language Arts/Spanish as Second Language
City of Residence: Glendale
Years Teaching: 25

Maria feels fortunate in being a bilingual educator because through her daily efforts her dual immersion students are able to feel the importance of their home culture and have their identities validated by the diverse community that is in her classroom.

Quote of Note:

Proud parents state that "Dr. Capdevila's incredible reputation was a driving force in making sure our daughter continued in the Spanish program at her middle school."



Amy Hogan

Glendora Unified School District
Stanton Elementary School—Fifth Grade
City of Residence: Glendora
Years Teaching: 14

To combat chronic absenteeism among too many of her fifth-graders, Amy tried many things, including crafts and field trips tied to their science and social studies curriculum. All these helped to make the classroom lessons more relevant to her students' lives.

Quote of Note:

A PTA president and involved parent offers praise: "Amy Hogan really stands out from the crowd, even with the high caliber of staff we are blessed with at our school."



Fany Melendez

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District
Valinda School of Academics—Second Grade/Spanish Dual Immersion
City of Residence: Covina
Years Teaching: 13

As a new teacher, Fany began using ideas she'd seen her favorite teachers use in her own academic journey. Later after taking professional development classes, she understood why those classroom strategies worked so well.

Quote of Note:

A parent's testimony: "My son had strong feelings about his experience in Ms. Melendez' class. He told us learning in her class was a lot of fun, so kids like it."

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Alicia Cataudella

Hawthorne School District
York Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Harbor City
Years Teaching: 28

Because Alicia feels it is important for her students to be exposed to as many campus experiences as possible, she volunteers at multiple events held at her school. These include Fall Carnival, Math Night, Literacy Night, and Multicultural Night.

Quote of Note:

Praise from a fellow teacher: “Alicia loves being a teacher, and her reward is seeing her students succeed. I marvel at how she builds a strong rapport with all of them.”



Gabriela Gallegos

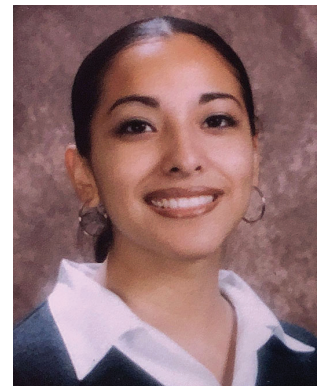
Inglewood Unified School District
Centinela TK-8 School—Seventh Grade

City of Residence: Los Angeles
Years Teaching: 25

An integral part of her K-8 school, Gabriela has been in leadership positions for over 20 year and still keeps in touch with some of her students from 25 years ago. Students and visitors alike have compared her seventh-grade classroom to being with family.

Quote of Note:

Appreciative words from a former student: “Ms. G’s unique ability to get to know all of her students individually makes her an exceptional middle school teacher.”



Alan Trattner

Keppel Union School District
Alpine Elementary School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Chatsworth
Years Teaching: 21

Beyond academics, Alan’s goal for his fifth-graders is to help create confident young people ready to take on the world. “I celebrate all successes, big and small,” he states, “so that every student feels like I am their biggest cheerleader—because I am!”

Quote of Note:

A fellow teacher shows appreciation: “Alan is more than willing to pass his knowledge and expertise on to colleagues, especially those that are new to the profession.”



Michael Scott Kauffman

La Canada Unified School District
La Canada High School—Art & Ceramics

City of Residence: Santa Clarita
Years Teaching: 30

Over his thirty-year tenure, Mike has taught a wide variety of art classes, including portfolio, beginning and advanced ceramics and independent projects. He has also served as department chair and remains deeply engaged in his students’ artwork.

Quote of Note:

“Mike not only curates La Canada High’s annual Fine Arts Show,” notes a colleague, but partners with JPL and other community organizations to promote student work.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Nicole Reed White

Lancaster School District
Amargosa Creek Middle School—Science & Computer Science
City of Residence: Valencia
Years Teaching: 22

Nicole's goal is to engage every student, to capture their undivided attention through caring, passion, patience, and humor. When a new student arrives in her classroom, she welcomes them with open arms and provides to each a nurturing environment.

Quote of Note:

Testimony from a colleague: "Nicole emphasizes to her science and computer science students the importance of asking questions and nurturing their innate curiosity."



Trini Rodríguez

Lennox School District
Moffett Elementary School—Dual Language Kindergarten
City of Residence: Hawthorne
Years Teaching: 26

Trini started as a Teacher's Assistant 30 years ago and has been teaching ever since. To celebrate her kindergartners' success, Trini takes photos of moments of excellence for a student memory book that is later cherished by students and their families.

Quote of Note:

A salute from an appreciative parent: "Ms. Rodriguez supports us parents by offering workshops that empower us with strategies and resources that we can use at home."



Beth Bonilla

Little Lake City School District
Lakeview Elementary School—K-5/Teacher on Special Assignment
City of Residence: Whittier
Years Teaching: 14

During her fourteen-year educational career, Beth has worn many teaching hats. After considerable classroom time in both general and special education, she currently supports students and staff as a Teacher on Special Assignment at Lakeview Elementary School.

Quote of Note:

A colleague expresses appreciation: "As a Teacher on Special Assignment, Beth has been providing instructional clarity and leadership to her fellow teachers."



Ky-Phong Paul Tran

Long Beach Unified School District
Renaissance High School for the Arts—English & AP English/Film Production
City of Residence: Torrance
Years Teaching: 14

Mr. Tran enjoys the freedom and fun teachers can have. He will reshape a lesson to focus on a current event while still teaching the same skills. By fun, he means lots of banter and jokes. He explains, "I teach teenagers, and they're natural entertainers."

Quote of Note:

An ex-student writes: "During a school literary event, Mr. Tran invited me and other student poets to share their work before an audience and join a panel of guest authors."

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25

David Olivares

Los Angeles County Office of Education
Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall—Math/Science/English/Social Science

City of Residence: Long Beach
Years Teaching: 27

David dropped out of law school to pursue a career in education, specifically to be a teacher and advocate for the most vulnerable students in the juvenile justice system. He is an advocate for students, parents, teachers, counselors, and education personnel.

Quote of Note:

Praise from an administrator: “Mr. Olivares’ work at our juvenile hall school has not only benefited our students academically, but also set a standard for his colleagues.”



Evelyn Caballero-Martinez

Los Angeles Unified School District
Canterbury Avenue Elementary & Gifted Magnet School—Third Grade

City of Residence: Sylmar
Years Teaching: 20

Evelyn likens a typical day with her third-graders to a day at sea. She plans a few destination islands but understands each student will sail their own boat. And while some may need only a gentle breeze to guide them, others require a strong wind.

Quote of Note:

From an ex-student, now a colleague: “Mrs. Caballero is always researching new and innovative teaching strategies that she can share with her fellow teachers.”



David Metz

Los Angeles Unified School District
Santee Education Complex—Theater

City of Residence: Los Angeles
Years Teaching: 14

David helps his theater students overcome stage fright. They learn to push themselves and take risks. He also helps them unlearn limiting beliefs, in order to deal with nerves and develop “stage presence,” the ability to perform on stage without crippling fear.

Quote of Note:

A theater colleague marvels, “I am always impressed by how David creates inclusive and safe spaces for each of his students to perform in their own comfort zones.”



Michelle Esquibel-Sanchez

Los Nietos School District
Los Nietos Middle School STEAM Academy

City of Residence: Norwalk
Years Teaching: 26

Michelle is still amazed that a shy child who struggled to find the courage to speak in front of people would one day become a teacher. But today many ex-students come by to say “Hi” and even tell her that they miss her class and still use her math notes.

Quote of Note:

Unqualified praise from a fellow teacher: “Michelle embraces the challenges involved in working with every student, whether general, special education or English Learner.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Claudio Toledo

Lynwood Unified School District
Vista High School—English

City of Residence: South Gate
Years Teaching: 24

Teaching English at a continuation high school is a challenge Claudio embraces. He begins each day with a college-level vocabulary development program followed by handouts designed to bring them up to speed with reading and comprehension.

Quote of Note:

“Dr. Toledo is a true team player,” notes an administrator, “always willing to collaborate with colleagues, share best practices and contribute to the success of our school.”



Michelle Mangan

Manhattan Beach Unified School District
Meadows Elementary School—TK & Kindergarten

City of Residence: Redondo Beach
Years Teaching: 40

Through four decades in education, Michelle has worked with teen moms and infants, taught at-risk preschoolers and an inner-city bilingual kindergarten, taught parenting workshops and at four of her district’s five elementary schools. Retirement beckons!

Quote of Note:

An administrator notes, “Her students and colleagues are so proud that in 2024, Michelle’s last year of teaching, she was selected District Teacher of the Year.”



Rochelle Munoz

Monrovia Unified School District
Plymouth Elementary School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Glendora
Years Teaching: 23

When Rochelle became pregnant as a high school junior, her chemistry teacher’s guidance helped her stay in school and pursue an early college program. This experience showed her how a teacher can make a positive difference in young lives.

Quote of Note:

Eloquent testimony from a fellow teacher: “Rochelle has been my mentor, and continues to inspire me and my colleagues to hold high expectations for our learners.”



Martha Ramos

Montebello Unified School District
Cesar Chavez Elementary School—Transitional Kindergarten

City of Residence: Commerce
Years Teaching: 30

Over the course of her three decades in elementary classroom education, Martha has taught preschool, kindergarten and transitional kindergarten. She has always been a strong advocate for both social and emotional learning in her daily teaching.

Quote of Note:

A parent volunteer offers strong support: “Martha’s patience and hard work with young children are clearly evident and very much appreciated by all the kindergarten parents.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Arlene LeGaspe

Mountain View School District
Parkview School—Eighth Grade Math/Science

City of Residence: West Covina
Years Teaching: 30

As a passionate advocate for STEM education, Arlene is known for organizing enriching study trips, enhancing the learning experience beyond the classroom. An example is allowing her eighth-graders to experience and explore the physics of roller coasters.

Quote of Note:

Words of support from an administrator: “Arlene is not only a leader among her peers but also fosters a strong sense of community among the entire school staff.”



Sarah Malec

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District
Corvallis Middle School—Science

City of Residence: Long Beach
Years Teaching: 14

Sarah has championed a science program that pairs each of her eighth-graders with a STEM professional. This allows them not only to learn about many exciting careers and fields but to seek practical guidance from their mentors about colleges and careers.

Quote of Note:

High collegial praise: “Mrs. Malec is truly one of the most professional, kind, and knowledgeable teachers whom I have ever had the pleasure to work with.”



Kristin Biggins

Palos Verdes Unified School District
Soleado Elementary School—Second Grade

City of Residence: Redondo Beach
Years Teaching: 36

Kristin Biggins has been an elementary classroom teacher for 36 years and regards it as her great privilege to have spent the majority of those years as a second-grade teacher at Soleado Elementary School in Rancho Palos Verdes.

Quote of Note:

A district administrator shows these feelings are mutual: “In my experience, the whole school staff and many of our students and families regard Ms. Biggins as a treasure.”



Janel Lenox

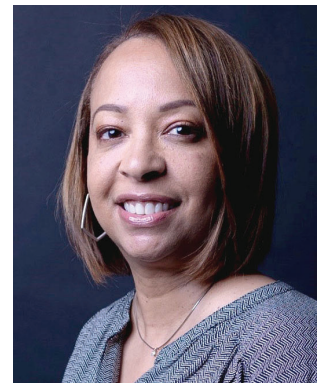
Paramount Unified School District
Wirtz Elementary School—Math Intervention

City of Residence: Long Beach
Years Teaching: 27

Every year Janel writes a personal letter to parents, asking for their insights on the type of encouragement their child responds to, their strengths and weaknesses both academically and personally, and their hopes and dreams for their child during the year.

Quote of Note:

A compliment from a fourth-grader: “Ms. Lenox made sure what was taught us was not just used in school but every day, like having self-confidence and speaking properly.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Robyn Wehrly

Pasadena Unified School District
Octavia E. Butler Magnet—Math & Science Special Day Class

City of Residence: Pasadena
Years Teaching: 21

For the past five years, since getting her master's degree in Special Education, Robyn has taught the math and science Special Day Class at Butler Magnet in Pasadena, a Dual Language and STEAM Magnet school that serves a diverse community of students.

Quote of Note:

Notes a fellow teacher, "With her undergraduate degrees in English and Psychology, Ms. Lenox brings a rich and stimulating background to her middle-schoolers."



Joseph Shim

Pomona Unified School District
Pantera Elementary School—Language Arts/Science

City of Residence: Diamond Bar
Years Teaching: 32

During the pandemic, Joseph created a districtwide math-science competition and a robotics club, even enlisting sponsors to help reward those who enjoyed the challenges. In the years since, he has gone on to build on those community connections.

Quote of Note:

A proud ex-student speaks: "Thanks to Mr. Shim, at the end of the first COVID year I spoke on a huge stage in front of many families without a mask and felt empowered."



Geoffrey Watts

Redondo Beach Unified School District
Redondo Union High School—Modern World History

City of Residence: Lakewood
Years Teaching: 17

In his modern world history classroom, Geoffrey embraces the daily challenge of being both accommodating and challenging to a wide range of learners, from those who are AP-level readers and writers to others who are performing far below grade level.

Quote of Note:

A colleague is lavish in her praise: "Geoff's expertise in history and special education and his unwavering support for his colleagues make him an exemplary teacher."



Teresa Turetzky

Rosemead School District
Muscatel Middle School—Special Academic Instruction

City of Residence: Rosemead
Years Teaching: 5

Teresa serves as her middle school's Leader in Me Lighthouse coordinator, working to build up leadership skills and empowering students to lead clubs and other school activities. She has a particular affinity for the many special needs students she teaches.

Quote of Note:

Kudos from a colleague: "As you walk into Teresa's classroom, it's obvious how creative and passionate she is in her efforts to shape the best experience for her students."

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Stacy Travisano

San Marino Unified School District
K. L. Carver Elementary School—Fifth Grade
City of Residence: Glendora
Years Teaching: 19

As the mother of a special needs son, Stacy launched a career doing educational voice-overs, then used her voice to help students with disabilities, including her own son. She now uses those same tools in her classroom to empower her fifth-grade students.

Quote of Note:

In the words of a district administrator, “Stacy is an exceptional educator with a profound understanding of child development and a genuine love for teaching.”



Tina Macabitas

Saugus Union School District
Skyblue Mesa Elementary School—Special Education
City of Residence: Valencia
Years Teaching: 10

For Tina, Special Education means she has the privilege of teaching exceptional learners of varied abilities and diverse backgrounds. To guide their grade-level mainstreaming, she communicates daily with her general education colleagues.

Quote of Note:

A grateful grandmother writes, “Mrs. Macabitas worked hard to discover strategies that worked for my grandson and realized he needed more frequent snacks than others.”



Oliver Valcorza

South Pasadena Unified School District
South Pasadena High School—English/Ethnic Studies/World & AP U.S. History
City of Residence: Glendale
Years Teaching: 16

Oliver was humbled when students volunteered to write letters of recommendation for his Teacher of the Year application. The honor of a dozen unsolicited letters, spanning his career over many years, left him tearful, happy, embarrassed, but above all proud.

Quote of Note:

An excerpt from one of those student letters: “Mr. Valcorza has been more than just a teacher to me over the past decade. He has fundamentally shaped who I am today.”



Dolores Lopez

Temple City Unified School District
Dr. Doug Sears Learning Center—English/Teen Living/Leadership
City of Residence: Azusa
Years Teaching: 9

Teaching at her continuation high school, Dolores found ways to connect with students needing extra support. She created a leadership class where they would read with elementary students, then took them on field trips to complete community service hours.

Quote of Note:

Strong support from an administrator: “Dolores is the driving force behind schoolwide celebrations, creating a sense of community and pride among students and staff alike.”



Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25



Christina Phillips

Walnut Valley Unified School District
Quail Summit Elementary School—Third Grade

City of Residence: San Dimas

Years Teaching: 26

Christina celebrated when she took her last math class in college. She thought she would never have to take another math class again. Little did she dream that teaching math would become her passion, to the point of reading math content in her free time.

Quote of Note:

Heartfelt praise from an ex-student: “I have loved my other teachers, but Mrs. Phillips truly is one of a kind. She’s the reason why I feel successful in reading today.”



Shannon Vezina

West Covina Unified School District
Orangewood Elementary School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Upland

Years Teaching: 16

A small space in the front of Shannon’s classroom is dedicated to photos she’s taken with returning students. Whenever she glances over at all the smiling faces of those students, she’s honored they took time to visit her and include her in their life journey.

Quote of Note:

Poignant praise from the mother of a high-functioning autistic fifth-grader: “Shannon was able to reach my son, and under her caring supervision he was very successful.”



Claudia Herrera

Whittier City School District
Daniel Phelan Language Academy—Dual Immersion Transitional Kindergarten

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 23

Through her language academy’s Dual Immersion program, Claudia integrates Spanish into her kindergarten lessons. By providing a rich educational experience for her diverse group of learners, she promotes bilingualism along with cultural appreciation.

Quote of Note:

An administrator offers strong support: “With her self-confidence and a warm and nurturing demeanor, Claudia creates a vibrant learning environment for her students.”

Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2024-25

Thelma Krikorian

Whittier Union High School District
Whittier High School—Chemistry

City of Residence: Whittier
Years Teaching: 22

Thelma's teaching journey really began in high school, when she volunteered to tutor her neighbor's daughter. Right from the beginning she realized she needed to make the learning fun, so she created a board game with the girl's weekly spelling words.

Quote of Note:

"It's not uncommon to find Thelma's classroom full of students in the afternoon after school," notes her principal, "even on a Friday afternoon before a three-day weekend."



Antonio Ortega

Wilsona School District
Challenger Middle School—Math/Science

City of Residence: Palmdale
Years Teaching: 7

As the son of immigrants, Antonio views teaching as his way of paying back to the community and school that helped form the person he is today. He encourages student success by reminding them that it doesn't matter where you start, it's where you finish.

Quote of Note:

A colleague shares her admiration: "Besides teaching sixth-grade math and science, Mr. Ortega serves as school EL Coordinator and coach of the boys' basketball team."



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