

# In Honor of Teaching Achievement



## Los Angeles County **TEACHERS** of the **YEAR** **2023-24**

### **Agenda**

- 10:00 Arrival and Check-In / Open Reception
- 11:00 Opening Ceremony
  - Welcoming Remarks:
    - Superintendent Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
    - Nicolas Kiet Quach, Alhambra HS Senior
    - Adam Shapiro, Entertainer
  - Master of Ceremonies:
    - Elizabeth Graswich, Executive Director of Public Affairs and Communications, LACOE
- 11:10 California TOY Speeches:
  - Catherine Borek, Compton USD
  - Bridgette Donald-Blue, LAUSD
  - Jason Torres-Rangel (National Nominee), LAUSD
- 11:20 Presentation of the 16 County Teachers of the Year
- 12:15 Lunch**
- 1:15 Presentation of the 52 District Teachers of the Year
- 2:15 Door Prizes and Grand Prize
- 2:20 Adjourn

### **Announcement and Awards Luncheon** **Friday, September 22, 2023** **Hilton Universal City and Towers**

The 2023-24 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 68 district-level Teacher-of-the-Year representatives.

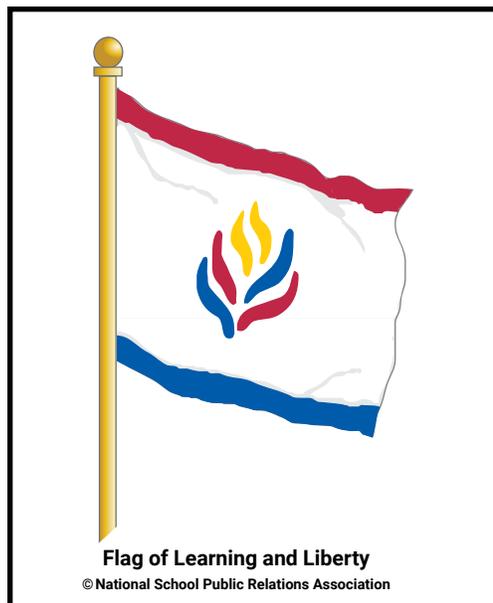
## County – State

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.



“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.”

—Benjamin Franklin

# California Teachers of the Year

Since our program began in 1983, 46 Los Angeles County teachers have gone on to be selected as California Teachers of the Year:

- |      |  |      |   |
|------|--|------|---|
| 1985 | Evaline Khayat Kruse, LAUSD  | 2008 | Lewis Chappellear, LAUSD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i><br>Michael Allen Long, South Whittier SD                              |
| 1987 | Shirley Rosenkranz, Temple City USD  | 2009 | Jose Navarro IV, LAUSD  |
| 1988 | Lorna Mae Nagata, Alhambra SD  | 2011 | Beverly Gonzalez, Baldwin Park USD  |
| 1993 | Patricia Baltz, Arcadia USD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i><br>Edward Riegler, Alhambra SD                                    | 2012 | Florence Avognon, LACOE<br>Ken LaVigne, Whittier UHSD<br>Rebecca Mieliwocki, Burbank USD<br><i>(National Teacher of the Year)</i> |
| 1994 | Beth Cassford, Little Lake City SD   | 2013 | Veronica Marquez, LAUSD   |
| 1995 | Richard Chapleau, Antelope Valley UHSD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i><br>Rhoda Paulette Coleman, Lennox SD                   | 2014 | Michael Hayden, Manhattan Beach USD   |
| 1996 | Cedric Anderson, LACOE<br>Sandy Fleishman, Las Virgenes USD<br>Javier Gonzalez, Whittier UHSD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i> | 2015 | Maggie Mabery, Manhattan Beach USD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i><br>Lovelyn Marquez-Prueher, LAUSD                           |
| 1997 | Carole Firestone, Las Virgenes USD   | 2016 | Daniel Jocz, LAUSD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i>   |
| 1998 | Linwood C. Thompson, Bellflower USD  | 2017 | Isela Lieber, LAUSD   |
| 1999 | Ingrid Boydston, Saugus Union SD   | 2018 | Kirsten Farrell, LAUSD<br>Erin Oxhorn-Gilpin, Castaic Union SD  |
| 2000 | Marilyn Whirry, Manhattan Beach USD<br><i>(National Teacher of the Year)</i>   | 2019 | Michael Henges, Redondo Beach USD<br>Kimberlee Holz, Manhattan Beach USD  |
| 2001 | Adele Prince, Glendora USD   | 2021 | Jim Klipfel, William S. Hart UHSD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i>  |
| 2002 | Mary Eileen Geer, West Covina USD  | 2022 | Virginia Vasquez, Alhambra USD  |
| 2004 | Paul McLaughlin, Walnut Valley USD   | 2023 | Catherine Borek, Compton USD<br>Bridgette Donald-Blue, LAUSD<br>Jason Torres-Rangel, LAUSD<br><i>(State National Nominee)</i>     |
| 2005 | Kim Labinger, Glendale USD   |      |   |
| 2006 | Denis Cruz, Whittier City Elementary SD<br>Kelly Jean Hanock, LAUSD  |      |   |
| 2007 | Dawna Countryman, Saugus Union SD<br>Helen Papadopoulous, Walnut Valley USD<br>Alan Sitomer, Lynwood 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 2023-24 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

The Los Angeles County Office of Education thanks the **LACOE Signature Fund @GLA** Sponsors 2023-24.



Trusted Partner of the Education Community



THE GREATER LA  
EDUCATION FOUNDATION





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

Welcome to the 2023 Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year Awards Luncheon. It's truly a pleasure to join you today in honoring the exceptional leadership and contributions made by our outstanding educators within Los Angeles County schools.

In my role as the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, I am privileged to host this annual event dedicated to celebrating the thousands of teachers across L.A. County who have dedicated their careers to enriching the lives of children.

Each Teacher of the Year nominee models the highest standards within the teaching profession. We express our gratitude for their unwavering dedication and hard work. As we proudly applaud and commemorate the accomplishments of the 16 Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year who have been unveiled today, we also extend our best wishes to them as they advance to the state-level competition.

I hope that each and every one of you enjoys today's celebrations and takes pride in the incredible impact you make on our students. My warmest congratulations to all of you on this remarkable achievement!

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

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



**Yvonne Chan, Ed.D.**  
**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 2023-24 L.A. County Teachers of the Year Awards Luncheon. You are here today as Teachers of the Year and this award provides validation for your years of hard work and sacrifice for the teaching profession. You have not only overcome many challenges with tenacity and creativity, you have gone above and beyond the regular duties of a teacher to truly make positive impact on a school, district and community.

I was always amazed by the teachers in the classrooms where I visited throughout the county. I witnessed how teachers touch the students each day in a caring and personal way. They consistently inspire all students to learn, find innovative ways to make the material accessible to all students, role model effective teamwork, get grants to help enhance instruction and provide parents with resources to continue the learning process at home.

As we reflect on how far we have come, there is still much to do. Thank you for your continuous work on taking on leadership positions, keeping up with the latest education issues and policies, building community partnerships and serving as ambassadors of education. The entire County Board salutes you, supports you, and thanks you.

  
Yvonne Chan, Ed.D.  
Board President



## A Message from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

September 22, 2023

Welcome to the 42nd annual Los Angeles County Office of Education Teachers of the Year Awards program! Congratulations to all the outstanding teachers who are being recognized today for excellence in teaching.

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Thurmond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being particularly prominent.

Tony Thurmond  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction





## Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Melissa Ellis**

Bellflower Unified School District  
Bellflower High School—CTE/Intro to Health Careers

City of Residence: Long Beach  
Years Teaching: 17

When the pandemic kept Melissa's Medical Assistant students from internships in real clinical settings, she got her principal's okay to create a mock hospital in an abandoned music room with real hospital beds, EKG machine, vitals monitors and a nurses' station.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A colleague praises Melissa's "ability to partner with the community to keep her students informed and updated about best practices in the health and mental health fields."



### **Alanna Grimaldi**

Burbank Unified School District  
Luther Burbank Middle School—Sixth-Grade Science

City of Residence: La Crescenta  
Years Teaching: 13

On a rainy day when an inattentive sixth-grade science student made a paper boat, Alanna used this distraction as a teachable moment. "We all made boats, went outside and floated them down a makeshift river, analyzing both the water cycle and erosion."

#### **Quote of Note:**

Thoughtful praise from a PTA parent: "I have seen firsthand how much Mrs. Grimaldi cares for science and the many ways she finds to engage her students in learning."



### **May DeGuzman**

Centinela Valley Union High School District  
Leuzinger High School—AP English Literature & Composition

City of Residence: Redondo Beach  
Years Teaching: 20

May strives to be both demanding and flexible, depending on each student's needs and circumstances. Her lunchtime English tutoring class typically includes an eclectic mix of students in AP English, general education, and Long-Term English Learners.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A colleague mentored by May notes, "She has a welcoming ear for all and continues to mentor both students and other teachers long after they have left her classroom."



### **Kirsten Neill**

Downey Unified School District  
Old River Elementary School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Cypress  
Years Teaching: 13

For Kirsten, teaching has long been the family business. Her parents, grandfather, and great-grandmother were all educators. When not in her fifth-grade classroom, she coaches Robotics, Carnival of Champions, Sphero Bolts Club, and the Gator Tech Squad.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"Because of the projects we've done this school year," writes an appreciative ex-student, "I envision becoming an engineer and helping the earth become a better place."



## Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### **Hannah Rodriguez**

Duarte Unified School District  
Beardslee Academy—Preschool Special Education

City of Residence: Monrovia  
Years Teaching: 16

As a preschool special ed teacher, Hannah rejoices in such successes as helping a child say “Mommy” for the first time or wave goodbye. Such milestones—first steps, first signs, first sounds—have been known to bring cheers and tears to an entire classroom.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Grateful words from parents of an autistic son: “We never imagined we would meet and fall in love with a teacher like Ms. Rodriguez who would surpass all our expectations.”



### **Bryan Johnson**

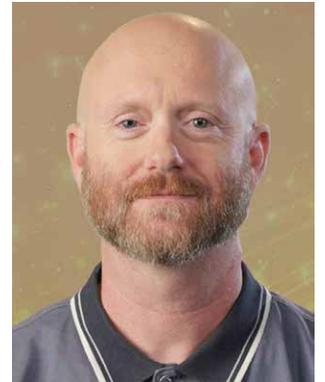
Keppel Union School District  
Daisy Gibson School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Lancaster  
Years Teaching: 18

Building literacy with students with limited or no English skills is the greatest challenge Bryan faces each day in his fifth-grade classroom. This awesome opportunity to play a key role in their development he considers the most rewarding aspect of being a teacher.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A colleague expresses her appreciation for Bryan’s mentoring: “He’s overflowing with natural teaching talent, and I feel fortunate to have been guided by him.”



### **Kimberly Furman**

Lancaster School District  
The Promise Academy—Kindergarten/Eighth-Grade Adapted PE

City of Residence: Palmdale  
Years Teaching: 22

For Kimberly, a typical day in Adapted Physical Education might be helping a blind student hit a wiffle ball off a tee so the girl can participate in family yard baseball. As one of her coworkers joked, “Furman, you teach PE and just play all day long.”

#### **Quote of Note:**

According to her principal, “Ms. Furman achieves a high level of student participation in her moderate-to-severe class thanks to her positive interactions with students.”



### **Drew Lewis**

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts—Music

City of Residence: Upland  
Years Teaching: 17

Drew’s students often perform as vocal soloists and in choral groups. Many go on to audition for prestigious scholarships and awards. And all this despite the fact that most of them have never read a piece of sheet music prior to entering high school.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A former student offers heartfelt thanks: “Without Mr. Lewis and his support, I would not be at the University of Southern California today pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Vocal Arts.”





## Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Marcella Lopez**

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Frank del Olmo Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Pasadena  
Years Teaching: 24

Marcella's goal is to make her first-grade classroom the students' "home away from home, with a teacher who loves you and cares for you dearly as if you were my own." Every wall displays student artwork, some graded for growth, some created just for fun.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Testimony from an ex-student: "I'll be forever grateful for the love Ms. Lopez showed me even in the darkest days of my youth. She made me feel safe, cared for, and valued."



### **Kimberly Min**

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Open Magnet Charter School—First & Second Grades

City of Residence: Los Angeles  
Years Teaching: 22

Post-pandemic, Kimberly has revised the old "those who can" cliché. Her version goes like this: "Those who can—teach. Those who can—pivot on a dime and set up classrooms in their living rooms. Those who can—are creative and make learning come alive."

#### **Quote of Note:**

A parent praises Kimberly's creative adjustment to distance learning: "She never let the physical distance get in the way of connecting with each of her students individually."



### **Daniel Leonard**

Manhattan Beach Unified School District  
Manhattan Beach Middle School—Sixth-Grade Science

City of Residence: Manhattan Beach  
Years Teaching: 11

"Neil's" lifelong love for science and the environment, plus a skill at making difficult concepts understandable, all drew him to the teaching profession. His lessons are geared to motivate his students to go on in later life to create a better, more sustainable world.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"Beyond the classroom," writes an administrator, "Mr. Leonard coaches three sports, sponsors clubs on campus, and spearheads the expansion of the school garden."



### **Alison Meloserdoff**

Monrovia Unified School District  
Wild Rose School of Creative Arts—Third Grade

City of Residence: Glendora  
Years Teaching: 11

Alison fell in love with teaching after a college stint as a classroom volunteer. She regards it as a privilege to be in a "profession of impact" and a special gift to have found a career that "fills her soul." Summing it up, she states, "I was born to be an educator."

#### **Quote of Note:**

A mother of a special needs student writes: "Mrs. M's absolute warmth and the connection she creates with all her students made my daughter feel like she mattered."



## Los Angeles County Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### **Danielle Burson**

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District  
D.D. Johnston Elementary School—Kindergarten  
City of Residence: Long Beach  
Years Teaching: 30

Little girl Danielle’s favorite game with her friends was “school,” and she was always the teacher. She lined up chairs for them and wrote assignments on a chalkboard in her room. Even after completing thirty years in the classroom, she is eager for more.

#### **Quote of Note:**

“Mrs. Burson keeps in close communication with the parents,” notes one mother, “and she is always encouraging them to stay involved in their child’s achievements.”



### **Courtney Baker**

Redondo Beach Unified School District  
Jefferson Elementary School—First Grade  
City of Residence: Redondo Beach  
Years Teaching: 26

Courtney’s kindergarten classroom centers on two rules: “Be kind always and try your best.” These rules, she believes, allow her students to feel safe in sharing thoughts and ideas and motivates them to create a community of respect, academically and socially.

#### **Quote of Note:**

An appreciative parent recalls: “During COVID, Ms. Baker recorded herself reading stories each week and included Zoom theme days like making tents in their bedrooms.”



### **Casey Cuny**

William S. Hart Union School District  
Valencia High School—Honors English/Myth & Folklore  
City of Residence: Valencia  
Years Teaching: 19

Students are not thinking machines, Case points out, but emotional beings who are asked to think. Guiding one failing 11th-grader into a safe emotional place paid great dividends. The boy not only graduated but went on to college and became a nurse.

#### **Quote of Note:**

From an ex-student who went on to teach English herself: “Mr. Cuny has touched the lives of thousands of students and will continue to do so with his experience, skill, and wisdom.”



### **Aimee Glotz**

Wiseburn Unified School District  
Wiseburn Middle School—Sixth-Grade English  
City of Residence: El Segundo  
Years Teaching: 14

Every day Aimee feels privileged to share in the accomplishments of her middle school English students, declaring “their achievements are my achievements.” And not just hers, she believes, but all the teachers they had before her and all those they’ll have after.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Parents of a special needs student write: “Ms. Glotz’ patient and empathetic approach toward our son’s needs and learning style were instrumental in his educational journey.”



## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Sheldon Sparks**

Acton-Agua Dulce Unified School District  
Vasquez High School—AVID/Digital Design/AP Government/AP Economics

City of Residence: Canyon Country

Years Teaching: 13

Sheldon derives joy by equipping future generations with skills to help them succeed in their life endeavors. After a full day in the classroom, he starts his second job as athletic director, helping coaches and students work together to achieve team goals.

#### **Quote of Note:**

“Sheldon followed his heart in becoming a teacher,” a colleague comments. “Prior to that, he owned a very successful construction company and worked as a youth pastor.”



### **Rebecca Bartolome**

Antelope Valley Union High School District  
Antelope Valley High School—Engineering

City of Residence: Palmdale

Years Teaching: 6

When Rebecca left her 17-year career in aerospace to teach full time, she brought her knowledge and passion for engineering to her school’s Engineering Innovation Academy, providing her students real-world challenges along with unflagging support.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A former student speaks out: “Ask any of Ms. Bartolome’s students and they’ll tell you that she is where we all go for advice, understanding, and much-needed reality checks.”



### **Yumiko Goto**

Arcadia Unified School District  
Arcadia High School—AP Physics

City of Residence: Arcadia

Years Teaching: 22

From teaching elementary school in Tokyo to her current AP Physics classes at Arcadia High, Yumiko’s passion for being an educator has never wavered. She is reassured by student feedback how much they enjoy her classes and her involved, caring attitude.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Unstinting praise from an administrator: “Over the 15 years I’ve known her, Yumiko has demonstrated an endless amount of energy and enthusiasm in her role as an educator.”



### **Esther Campos-Ball**

Azusa Unified School District  
Azusa High School—Social Science

City of Residence: Azusa

Years Teaching: 22

When Esther shares her life experiences—what it was like for her to be an EL Learner, an immigrant, undocumented, a woman of color, a single parent, and how education opened doors for her—it creates a level of trust between her and her students.

#### **Quote of Note:**

From an ex-student who went on to Notre Dame University: “What sets Ms. Campos-Ball apart is her willingness and ability to connect with every student every day.”

## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### Alejandra Covarrubias

Baldwin Park Unified School District  
Olive Middle School—English Language Arts/Dual Language/ASB

City of Residence: West Covina  
Years Teaching: 18

Alejandra believes that dual language education is a key to understanding where her students are heading in life. She hopes that this vibrant cultural resource will continue to beckon others to explore the many dual language programs in our county.

#### Quote of Note:

A colleague writes, “Proudly, Alejandra has watched many of her dual-language students go on to graduate high school and be the first in their families to attend college.”



### Kristen Broman

Bassett Unified School District  
Bassett High School—English

City of Residence: Hacienda Heights  
Years Teaching: 3

In addition to teaching English and honors English, Kristen serves as school site council president, WASC self-study coordinator, and guiding coalition member. In her limited free time, she can be found attending student athletic events and chaperoning dances.

#### Quote of Note:

A coworker offers this: “The secret of Kristen’s teaching may be as simple as this, that she is inspired by her students to be the very best version of herself every day.”



### Jennifer Hegley

Beverly Hills Unified School District  
Beverly Hills High School—Computer Science/Math

City of Residence: Los Angeles  
Years Teaching: 16

What are the requirements for a successful teacher? Jennifer’s lengthy list includes patience, kindness, and compassion, along with consistent discipline and high expectations. “And don’t forget,” she adds, “a sense of humor and a bit of sarcasm.”

#### Quote of Note:

“Thanks to Jennifer’s recruitment of female students into the computer sciences,” notes a colleague, “Beverly Hills High received a Computer Science Female Diversity Award.”



### Deborah Rupel

Castaic Union School District  
Castaic Middle School—English/Yearbook

City of Residence: Granada Hills  
Years Teaching: 18

As English department chair of her middle school, Debbie strives to connect the literature her students read to their daily lives. In addition, she makes it a point to work with younger teachers to build their capacity and help them become campus leaders.

#### Quote of Note:

An administrator gives her a high rating: “Debbie believes strongly in collaborating with her peers, and she likes to work behind the scenes supporting other teachers.”



## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Ryan Easton**

Claremont Unified School District  
Claremont High School—AP Economics/IB History of the Americas  
City of Residence: Claremont  
Years Teaching: 14

When Ryan attended Claremont High years ago, he couldn't have envisioned that he would one day be elected history department chair—and later yet work as a teacher on special assignment supporting other teachers with curriculum development.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A colleague notes, "As a result of the Google Certified Innovator program and his own acumen, Ryan is able to advise others on the uses of technology in the classroom."



### **Rashanda McCruter**

Compton Unified School District  
Colin P. Kelly Elementary School—Seventh Grade/English/Social Studies  
City of Residence: Los Angeles  
Years Teaching: 20

After years teaching young children, Rashanda was struck by how their spontaneity in class discussions was replaced among her seventh-graders by fear. She strives to create an environment where students feel safe to communicate and read aloud.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Heartfelt praise from parents of a seventh-grader: "Mrs. McCruter goes above and beyond to ensure that her scholars know they matter—to her and to the world."



### **Joycelyn Glaspy**

Covina-Valley Unified School District  
Las Palmas Middle School—Special Education/Math/Renaissance Leadership  
City of Residence: Claremont  
Years Teaching: 23

Because her first name was often mispronounced in school, Joycelyn opted to be called "Joy" instead. Years later, when she became a teacher, she made sure she knew how to say the name of each student correctly. She also welcomes any preferred names.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"Mrs. Glaspy has taught me to make an all-out effort in every task I do," writes one special education student. "Whenever I need help, I know that I can talk to her."



### **Fallon Perdue-Smith**

Culver City Unified School District  
Culver City High School—Ethnic Studies/History/Special Education  
City of Residence: Hawthorne  
Years Teaching: 10

In addition to collaborating with her co-teachers in Culver City High's history department, Fallon manages the special education department and serves as the advisor for the black student union to create appropriate cultural celebrations.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A colleague writes, "Ms. Perdue genuinely cares for her students and their success and makes sure they have the tools and resources they need to reach that success."

## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### **Mallorie Polanco**

East Whittier City School District  
Hillview Middle School—School Social Worker

City of Residence: Whittier  
Years Teaching: 8

Mallorie's time at STEP (Success Through Engagement and Perseverance) has been an adventure in learning, for her and her students. Her ability to communicate during moments of crisis opened the pathway to her career in counseling and social work.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"For all her efforts to make a positive difference in the lives of our school's troubled students," notes an administrator, "Mallorie has been called a 'hope peddler.'"



### **Jaime Reyes**

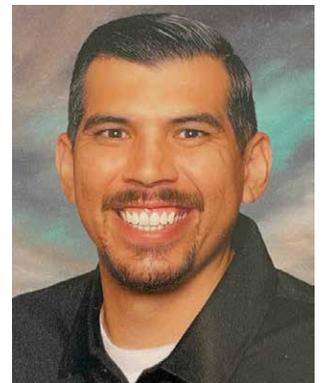
El Monte City School District  
New Lexington Elementary School—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: El Monte  
Years Teaching: 8

As a product of El Monte and an alumnus of his district, Jaime is passionate about the whole school community and about launching his fourth-grade students to be successful leaders. His enthusiastic approach can be seen both inside and outside the classroom.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Comment from an appreciative parent: "Mr. Reyes is known for working closely with his colleagues and with students and families to make New Lexington the best it can be!"



### **Catherine Flores**

El Monte Union High School District  
Arroyo High School—Mathematics

City of Residence: La Habra  
Years Teaching: 20

Cathy describes herself as a coach at heart. She approaches her math classes with the same mindset, showing up each day with the competitive drive to be the best math teacher she can be for her students, hoping to give them those "ah-ha" moments.

#### **Quote of Note:**

An administrator notes, "Cathy is singlehandedly effecting massive change in her district's math instruction (which is very hard to do with high school math teachers)."



### **Edwin Ponciano**

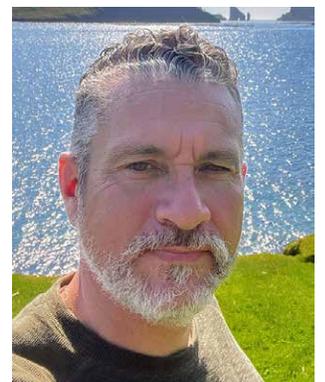
El Rancho Unified School District  
North Park Academy of the Arts—Mathematics

City of Residence: Hacienda Heights  
Years Teaching: 25

In his middle school math classes, Edwin does much more than simply focus on the subject matter. If his students have a positive and enjoyable experience in class, he has learned, there is a much higher likelihood that they will learn and succeed.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Praise from an administrator: "Mr. Ponciano assists his colleagues at North Park and throughout the district, helping them implement technology within the classroom."



## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Tiffany Maisonet**

El Segundo Unified School District  
El Segundo High School—AP Biology/Honors Medical Interventions  
City of Residence: El Segundo  
Years Teaching: 16

Tiffany comes from a long line of teachers, and it didn't take her long to realize her true calling. "Teaching makes me happy," she explains, "especially teaching science and helping students realize they are part of the incredible biodiversity of this planet."

#### **Quote of Note:**

A former student recalls a special teacher: "I've spent extra time in Ms. Maisonet's classroom because of the safety and comfort I feel when surrounded by her presence."



### **Narine Yapundjian**

Glendale Unified School District  
Balboa Elementary School—Third Grade  
City of Residence: Glendale  
Years Teaching: 10

Narine, who went to school in her district, often asks herself what it would be like to be one of her own students. What would she need from her teacher to feel like she didn't want to miss a day of school? The answers she gets help her "up her game" each day.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A colleague and parent offers a personal note: "My daughter was in her class last year and was so impressed that until today she cannot stop talking about Mrs. Yapundjian."



### **Ria Kubota**

Glendora Unified School District  
Goddard and Sandburg Middle School—Music/Orchestra  
City of Residence: Glendora  
Years Teaching: 24

Ria will never forget how, during a traumatic childhood, music class saved her life. Nor can she forget a few special teachers who helped her navigate the chaos and find hope. This is why she's always on the lookout to help students with special problems.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Praise from a colleague: "Whether or not Ria's students choose a career in music, they will leave her classroom with teamwork and leadership skills, integrity and passion."



### **Perla Granados-Ordaz**

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District  
Cedarlane Academy—Resource Specialist  
City of Residence: South El Monte  
Years Teaching: 11

Seeing the challenges faced by a younger brother with ADHD, Perla found herself drawn to the teaching profession and helping special needs students in particular. She strives to build comprehensive support systems for every student under her care.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A parent's heartfelt accolade: "I've seen firsthand the positive influence Mrs. Granados-Ordaz has had on my children and their classmates. She's an exceptional educator."

## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### Jennifer Valdiviezo

Hawthorne School District  
Hawthorne Middle School—Language Arts/History/AVID

City of Residence: Inglewood  
Years Teaching: 17

Over seventeen years of teaching middle school, through trial and error, Jennifer has come to believe that students learn from each other more than from books. She also believes school is a place to hone social skills like self-respect, teamwork, and leadership.

#### Quote of Note:

A student recalls fondly her time in AVID class: “Ms. Valdiviezo always has something to say and knows how to support her students to grow and become college-ready.”



### Eddie Conner

Inglewood Unified School District  
Morningside High School—American Government/Economics

City of Residence: Los Angeles  
Years Teaching: 22

Over and above his classroom teaching duties, Eddie is the founder of the Omega Gents Mentoring Foundation, which was created to drive educational performances, deter gang involvement, and foster improved morale and an uplifted school campus.

#### Quote of Note:

“Over the past 20 years,” notes a clearly admiring parent, “Eddie has mentored more than a hundred young men of color and provided annual academic scholarships.”



### Barbara Drange

La Canada Unified School District  
La Canada Elementary School—Fifth Grade Math & Science

City of Residence: Tujunga  
Years Teaching: 35

Though currently teaching fifth-grade math and science, Barb has spent time in nearly every grade level in the course of her 35 years in education. She not only directs her school’s Math Olympiad, but plans the annual fifth-grade field trip to Valley Forge.

#### Quote of Note:

“I can say with confidence,” writes an administrator, “that over her three-plus decades of classroom teaching, Barbara has positively impacted generations of students.”



### Kerrie Allen

Las Virgenes Unified School District  
Calabasas High School—Culinary Arts

City of Residence: Fillmore  
Years Teaching: 18

“Chef Carrie” (as she’s known on campus) created a successful multi-level Culinary Arts program for Calabasas High. There, her students not only learn all about various cuisines but develop the ability and artistry required in a professional culinary setting.

#### Quote of Note:

An enthusiastic administrator writes, “I do not exaggerate when I say that, were it possible, all our students would choose to take at least one of Chef Carrie’s courses.”



## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Emilia Gutierrez**

Lennox School District  
Felton Elementary School—Fourth Grade

City of Residence: Hawthorne

Years Teaching: 11

Emilia's fourth-graders know she's from the district. When anyone is late because the bus ran late or a mom didn't have gas money, she says "I'm happy you're here." All she asks in return is that they work hard and give her a hundred percent effort each day.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"The pandemic did not stop Mrs. Gutierrez from taking her students on virtual field trips and setting up a fun and engaging camp for them online," writes her principal.



### **Diana Sanchez**

Little Lake City School District  
Cresson Elementary School—Second & Third Grades

City of Residence: Whittier

Years Teaching: 21

Diana's two/three "combo" class requires a lot of flexibility, merging two pacing guides into one classroom. And this past year, having to deal with three different languages, she made sure that all her "newcomers" were made to feel welcome and highly valued.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A "room mom" writes: "There's just too much good to say about Mrs. Sanchez. She's a loving person who takes care to focus on every child's learning experience."



### **Thomas McNamee**

Long Beach Unified School District  
Lakewood High School—CTE Product Design/AP Computer Science

City of Residence: Lakewood

Years Teaching: 17

As a specialist in CTE, Tom strives to open the eyes of his students to the real-world expectations that await them. This involves heightening their career readiness through a wide range of experiences and by expanding technology use to all his students.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A fellow teacher weighs in with a heartfelt recommendation: "Tom has provided Lakewood students with valuable education skills they can utilize as lifelong learners."



### **Denise Torres Cancino**

Los Angeles County Office of Education  
International Polytechnic High School—Environmental Biology/Advanced Art

City of Residence: Upland

Years Teaching: 25

Denise has the most essential qualification for any science teacher—to love science. Moreover, she loves sharing that love with young people. As she puts it, "There is nothing like being in a room with a group of students eager and excited about learning."

#### **Quote of Note:**

"I have had the privilege of experiencing Mrs. Cancino's exceptional teaching abilities," writes a former student, "and the profound, lifelong impact she has on her students."

## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### Elsa Mora

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Carpenter Community Charter School—Fifth Grade

City of Residence: Studio City  
Years Teaching: 20

Having two non-English-speaking students in her classroom (from Nicaragua and the Ukraine) provided Elsa and her students with an invaluable opportunity for teaching and learning empathy and compassion beyond what they could get from a textbook.

#### Quote of Note:

A colleague shares this: “Through her empathetic heart, relentless energy and constant encouragement, Elsa’s ELD students thrive and blossom into exemplary learners.”



### Mark Ramos

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Benjamin Franklin High School—Ethnic Studies/AP World History

City of Residence: Los Angeles  
Years Teaching: 14

Ninth- and tenth-graders in Mark’s Ethnic Studies classes are challenged to find narratives that are often left out of traditional history classes. He pushes them to think about their own lives and their own stories in relation to larger historical narratives.

#### Quote of Note:

An admiring colleague notes, “Students of Mr. Ramos’ AP World History class develop historical thinking skills and a love of learning history—and mainly because of him.”



### Jennifer Kotsios

Los Nietos School District  
Aeolian Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: La Habra  
Years Teaching: 16

As an English Learner herself when she entered kindergarten, Jennifer views herself as a living example of how every school child can succeed. This helps her appreciate the real potential in each and every student in her own kindergarten classroom today.

#### Quote of Note:

An administrator notes: “Mrs. Kotsios’ classroom is a district model for other teachers to visit to learn best practices in developing social-emotional and academic skills.”



### Shirley Giacoman

Lynwood Unified School District  
Washington Elementary School—Fourth/Fifth-Grade Combo

City of Residence: Whittier  
Years Teaching: 17

Shirley believes the connections she builds between her and her fourth-graders can positively influence their lives and improve their well-being. These teacher-student connections, she’s convinced, can open a way to teamwork and motivate them to give their best.

#### Quote of Note:

A colleague notes, “Shirley wants her students to know that she believes in their ability to achieve their goals in the same way that her most impactful teachers believed in her.”



## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Olga Gallegos**

Mountain View School District  
Parkview K-8 School—ELA/History/Leadership & Reading Enrichment  
City of Residence: La Verne  
Years Teaching: 24

In the course of more than two decades with the district, Olga has taught a variety of grade levels and combo classes. She's currently working with the middle school-age group, focusing on 7th- and 8th-grade ELA/History, Leadership, and Reading Enrichment.

#### **Quote of Note:**

An administrator's unqualified vote of confidence: "Mrs. Gallegos is respected and admired by everyone—her students, their parents, and her fellow teachers."



### **Maurine Turner**

Palmdale School District  
Tumbleweed Elementary School—Fourth Grade  
City of Residence: Lancaster  
Years Teaching: 36

Maurine considers chasing her dream to become a teacher the best decision of her life. Moreover, after 36 years in the classroom, she's convinced you *can* teach an old dog new tricks. In other words, you must try new things to engage your students every day.

#### **Quote of Note:**

According to a colleague, "Maurine makes it her priority to speak with the parent of each student in her room and gives out her personal phone number to be available to all."



### **Julie Lie Maemoto**

Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District  
Palos Verdes High School—Biology  
City of Residence: Torrance  
Years Teaching: 22

Julie's passion to instill the love of science can be seen in her daily classroom interactions with her biology students. She attributes her teaching success to the strong mentorship of her mother, an LAUSD elementary school teacher for 30 years.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"Julie shows her commitment to helping beginning teachers by using them in her own classroom," comments a colleague, "and by serving as a BTSA, PAR and CPIP coach."



### **Pamela Fernandez**

Paramount Unified School District  
Paramount Park Middle School—ELA/ELD/AVID Excel  
City of Residence: Hawaiian Gardens  
Years Teaching: 5

Pamela considers herself more than just a teacher of 8th-grade English Language Arts, ELD, and AVID Excel. She's a lifelong learner who truly believes in the power of language to lead to more opportunities for growth by opening new perspectives.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Strong support from the mother of an ELD student: "Ms. Fernandez teaches her students to value their language, how to sharpen it and use it as an instrument of liberation."

## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### Marion Yamada

Pasadena Unified School District  
Hamilton Elementary School—Kindergarten

City of Residence: Pasadena  
Years Teaching: 16

Marion recalls her own years as a struggling English Learner. By working in early education to build a strong foundation in literacy for her own kindergarten students, she feels that she is helping “pay forward” some of what her first teachers did for her.

#### Quote of Note:

Praise from a colleague: “The desire of Mrs. Yamada’s ex-students to come back and lend a hand in her class is a result of her instilling a love of learning and serving others.”



### Donovan MacLeod

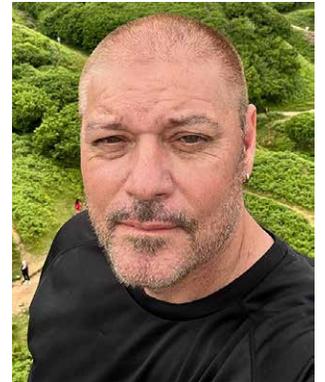
Pomona Unified School District  
Village Academy of Film & Technology—English/Language Arts

City of Residence: Covina  
Years Teaching: 16

Here’s Donovan’s teaching philosophy in order of importance: Establish expectations. Build relationships. Then teach content. So far in his teaching career, he says, students rise to agreed-upon expectations when given the opportunity and proper support.

#### Quote of Note:

An administrator writes, “Donovan has a remarkable ability to engage and inspire students, helping them develop their language skills and even their musical talents.”



### Kelly Lee

Rosemead School District  
Encinita Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Rosemead  
Years Teaching: 23

In her twenty-plus years at Encinita School, Kelly has taught first and second grades and combo classes. She goes out of her way to offer extra support for struggling students through after-school tutoring and working with parents to support their children.

#### Quote of Note:

“Outside the classroom,” according to a parent volunteer, “Kelly is always willing to lend a helping hand, whether it’s on the PTA board or at school fundraising events .”



### Rodney Donahue

Rowland Unified School District  
Nogales High School—Criminal Justice & Forensic Science

City of Residence: Long Beach  
Years Teaching: 10

Students in Rodney’s Criminal Justice, Forensic Science, and Law-Enforcement classes are captivated by his lessons, which take them step by step through real-world scenarios that make learning relevant to their own experiences and their lives.

#### Quote of Note:

According to an administrator, “You often see Mr. Donahue holding class outside the classroom, guiding his students as they evaluate scenarios and apply their knowledge.”



## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Aileen Schaefer**

San Marino Unified School District  
Huntington Middle School—Special Education

City of Residence: Duarte  
Years Teaching: 8

Beginning as an aide in San Marino schools more than 20 years ago, Aileen went back to school to return as a Special Educator working with middle-schoolers. Besides English and Social Studies, she teaches executive-functioning skills and self-advocacy.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"In addition to Academic Support classes," writes a fellow teacher, "Aileen is one of the advisors for Huntington Middle School's WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) program."



### **Shari Ramsey**

Saugus Union School District  
Cedarcreek Elementary School—Second Grade

City of Residence: Saugus  
Years Teaching: 21

A fourth-grade teacher changed Shari's life, helping her improve her reading comprehension and inspiring her to make a difference in other children's lives. For the past two decades Shari has been doing just that, as grateful ex-students have testified.

#### **Quote of Note:**

One ex-student recalls: "There was never a moment you could not ask Mrs. Ramsey for help, whether with multiplication and division lessons or even personal struggles."



### **Laura Youkstetter**

South Pasadena Unified School District  
South Pasadena High School—Special Education/Math & Science

City of Residence: San Gabriel  
Years Teaching: 15

A college summer tutoring at-risk youth convinced Laura that she'd found her true calling. She went on to join Teach for America, working with students with disabilities and learning challenges. Today Laura is proud to call herself a special educator.

#### **Quote of Note:**

"Ms. Youkstetter's greatest strength," declares an administrator, "may be her ability to persist with even the most challenging cases while maintaining an upbeat attitude."



### **Carrie Galloway**

South Whittier School District  
Loma Vista Elementary School—Third Grade

City of Residence: Orange  
Years Teaching: 25

Carrie works hard to come up with engaging lessons that her third-graders will enjoy and that will help them become critical thinkers. In her years on the school Leadership Team she has shared, guided, and collaborated with a great many of her colleagues.

#### **Quote of Note:**

A new teacher shows her admiration: "Watching the way Carrie builds loving, positive, and encouraging relationships with all her students has been an inspiration to me."

## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24

### Mihee Kim

Temple City Unified School District  
Temple City High School—AP Art & Design/Ceramics  
City of Residence: San Gabriel  
Years Teaching: 29

Art was the profession Mihee aspired to as a young Korean-American student. But an opportunity to teach ESL classes to recent Korean immigrants convinced her to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Art Education. Now she's happy to be an artist who teaches.

#### Quote of Note:

Thoughtful words from a former student: "Ms. Kim's teaching style, which offers constructive criticism alongside constant encouragement, has broadened my horizons."



### Chizuko Morimoto

Torrance Unified School District  
Howard Wood Elementary School—Kindergarten  
City of Residence: Torrance  
Years Teaching: 31

After three decades of teaching in the early primary grades, Chizuko has had many "generational students." Building relationships with particular families, generation after generation, is something that makes classroom teaching especially rewarding for her.

#### Quote of Note:

"In addition to her teaching duties," notes one parent, "Mrs. Morimoto is frequently seen at both current and former students' sporting events, dance and music performances."



### Jared Kaitz

Walnut Valley Unified School District  
Diamond Bar High School—Drama  
City of Residence: Brea  
Years Teaching: 6

Jared teaches Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced Drama, produces a Fall Play, Winter Show, Spring Musical, Spring Showcase, and Summer Musical, while acting as producer, director, costume, set and props designer and just about everything else.

#### Quote of Note:

A parent tips his hat: "In Jared's Advanced Theatre Production class, my daughter got to try her hand at directing, stage managing, prop building, even sewing costumes."



### Leticia Martínez

West Covina Unified School District  
Orangewood Elementary School—Dual Transitional Kindergarten  
City of Residence: West Covina  
Years Teaching: 30

Looking back, Leticia realizes how her mother's endless support and encouragement helped carry her through every life challenge. And it is still her mother's energy and commitment to humanity that Leticia feels every time she walks into the classroom.

#### Quote of Note:

Thoughtful words from an elementary school parent: "Ms. Martinez brings the community's culture and traditions into her classroom in meaningful ways."



## Los Angeles County District Teachers of the Year 2023-24



### **Katherine Salas**

Westside Union School District  
Anaverde Hills Elementary School—First Grade

City of Residence: Palmdale  
Years Teaching: 9

Katherine admits to thoughts of quitting her job during virtual learning. What kept her going was when her first-graders would ask, “When can we go back in the classroom?” When that day came, she was eager to close the gaps brought on by COVID.

#### **Quote of Note:**

Praise from a principal: “Mrs. Salas loves the outdoors and helped to start the Anaverde Loves the Earth event last year, and we have continued this tradition into this year.”



### **Sharon Suddarth-Carter**

Whittier City School District  
Hoover School of Fine Arts—K-5 Music/Drama

City of Residence: Whittier  
Years Teaching: 35

Teaching music and drama to elementary students is the most rewarding job Sharon can imagine. It gives her a front-row seat to witness young talents blossoming. The resulting self-confidence, she believes, “will carry them through the rest of their lives.”

#### **Quote of Note:**

During COVID, one parent recalls, “Mrs. Carter organized virtual baking sessions for her fifth-grade class in which parents were allowed only to assist with the oven.”



### **Mike Griffie**

Whittier Union High School District  
Santa Fe High School—Engineering Graphics/Architectural Design

City of Residence: Anaheim  
Years Teaching: 39

Mike has worn a number of teaching hats in his long career at Santa Fe High. A former department chair for both Special Education and Visual and Performing Arts, he’s moved on to technical education, specializing in engineering graphics and architectural design.

#### **Quote of Note:**

“In our Mechanical and Architectural Drafting Academy,” notes a proud administrator, “Mr. Griffie has his students using current, industry-level equipment and software.”



### **Tiffany Glassman**

Wilsona School District  
Challenger Middle School—English Language Arts/ELD

City of Residence: Lancaster  
Years Teaching: 7

A former Challenger Middle School student herself, Tiffany returned after college to make a positive difference in the community where she grew up. She works hard to come up with daily classroom strategies that will keep seventh-graders fully engaged.

#### **Quote of Note:**

“Tiffany is definitely a ‘team player’ known for her caring connection with students,” writes a colleague. “You can usually find her after school tutoring and coaching sports.”

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Published by LACOE Public Affairs and Communications • (562) 922-6360  
E-mail address: [communications@lacoedu](mailto:communications@lacoedu)  
[www.lacoedu](http://www.lacoedu)

PIN# 2014-09-12-1105-EP-4 (Rev. 9/2023)