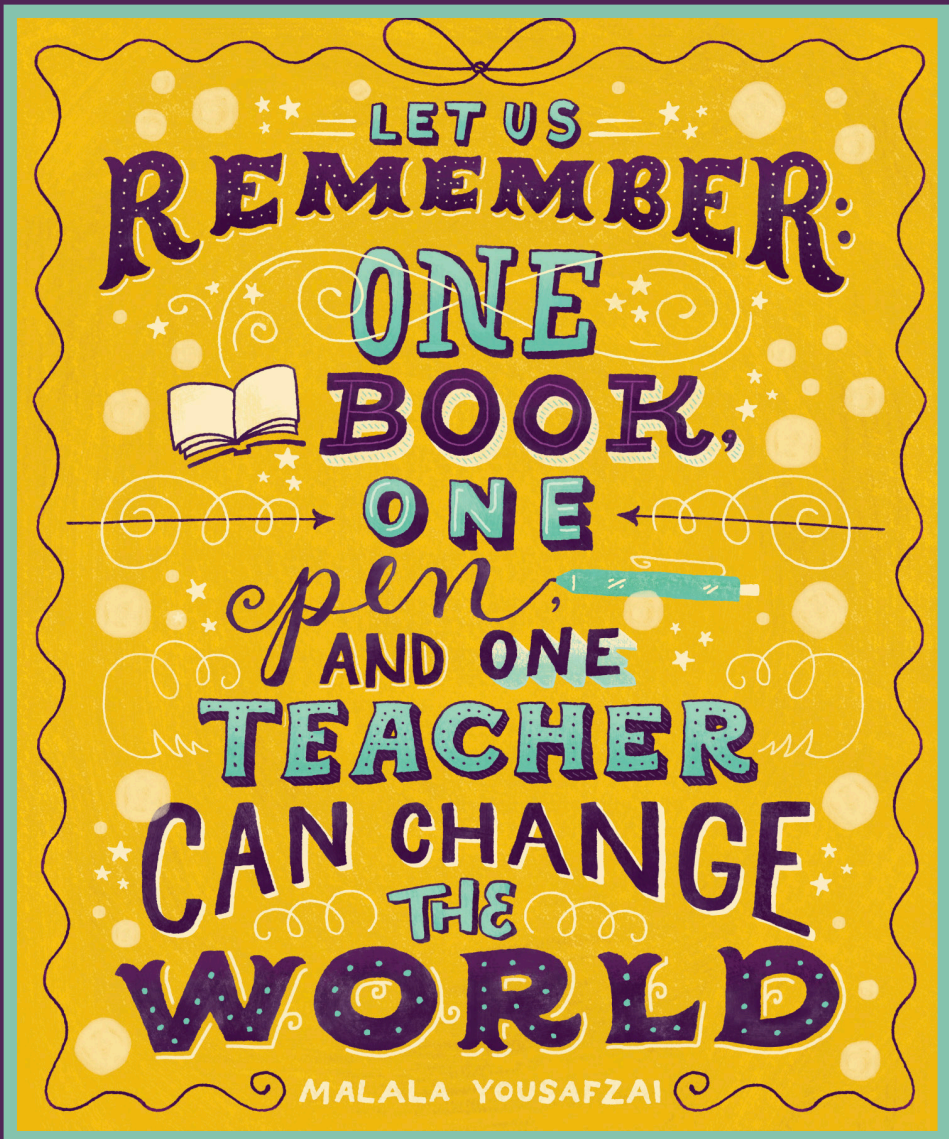


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Why We Teach

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Sacramento County 2024
TEACHERS OF THE YEAR
Share What Inspires Them



From the Sacramento County Office of Education

We're pleased to present you with the ninth edition of *Why We Teach*, an anthology of the wisdom and wit articulated by the exceptional teachers participating in the Sacramento County 2024 Teachers of the Year Program.



Local educational agencies in Sacramento County are invited to participate. As part of the selection process for two county winners, Teachers of the Year complete a comprehensive application packet, including an essay on their teaching philosophy.

We have published their insightful and inspirational words in this booklet for your enjoyment, along with a few classroom photos provided by the school districts or by the teachers.

I am proud of the outstanding teachers in our community who are helping ensure that our young people have the opportunity to achieve greatness, both personally and academically. Congratulations to all of the Sacramento County 2024 Teachers of the Year participants on a job well done!

David W. Gordon
Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools



Sacramento County **2024** Teachers of the Year

About the Sacramento County Teachers of the Year Program

All local educational agencies in Sacramento County are invited to participate in the Sacramento County Teachers of the Year Program by nominating one outstanding teacher. Larger school districts (Elk Grove Unified, Sacramento City Unified, San Juan Unified, and Twin Rivers Unified) may nominate two teachers.

Candidates are required to submit written responses to essay topics ranging from personal philosophy of teaching to understanding of current education issues.

A selection committee comprised of district and Sacramento County Office of Education representatives reads the applications and interviews the candidates.

The two candidates with the highest combined scores are selected as the Sacramento County Teachers of the Year. They advance to the California Teachers of the Year Program, where five California Teachers of the Year are selected in the Fall. One of the five California Teachers of the Year is selected to advance to the National Teachers of the Year Program. The National Teachers of the Year Program, coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers, has been conducted annually since 1952.

The two Sacramento County Teachers of the Year receive the Elinor Lincoln Hickey Award of Merit, the highest honor bestowed by the Sacramento County Board of Education. The names of the two teachers are also inscribed on perpetual trophies awarded by the Sacramento Scottish Rite.

District Teachers of the Year are honored by their districts throughout the year. They are also traditionally recognized during halftime at a Sacramento Republic FC soccer game, a Sacramento River Cats baseball game, and at a Sacramento Kings basketball game.

The Sacramento County Office of Education coordinates the Sacramento County Teachers of the Year Program.

WHY WE TEACH

Sacramento County Teachers of the Year Share What Inspires Them

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Kristin Chavez

ELK GROVE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Elizabeth Pinkerton Middle School
7th and 8th Grades • Special Education

As teachers, we hold a significant responsibility in shaping the lives of our students. Throughout my teaching career, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact we can have in helping students reach their full potential, regardless of the subject or grade level. However, achieving this requires collaboration, strengthening our profession, fostering peer collaboration, and holding ourselves accountable for our work both inside and outside the classroom.

Diversifying the learning experience for students is crucial, and the education profession greatly benefits from the inclusion of individuals with unique skills and qualities. I strongly urge anyone with an interest to consider becoming a teacher, as it is a profession that offers the opportunity to inspire and educate students who will shape the future of our society. Every teacher, regardless of the grade, subject, or educational specialty, possesses the power to instill a love of learning in their students and equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in life. Moreover, teaching offers competitive salaries, generous benefits, and a career path that can evolve to meet personal challenges. For those driven by the desire to make a positive impact and difference in the world, teaching is an ideal profession.

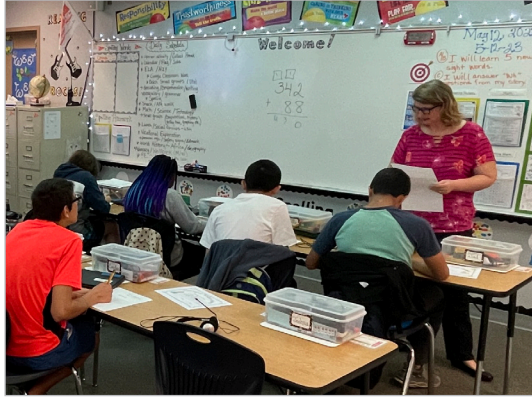
To strengthen the teaching profession, we must employ a variety of methods. Ongoing professional development plays a pivotal role, providing teachers with opportunities to continuously learn and grow throughout their careers. Professional development can take various forms, such as workshops, conferences, online courses, and peer collaboration. By investing in professional development, school districts empower teachers to enhance their skills and adapt to the ever-changing needs of their students.

Collaboration among teachers is another powerful way to bolster the teaching profession.

Working together collaboratively can take on many different forms, ranging from grade-level or subject-specific teams to schoolwide professional learning communities and cross-disciplinary projects. During the challenging period of remote instruction prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic, I actively engaged in numerous productive collaboration sessions



with colleagues from elementary and secondary schools. Together, we brainstormed ways to best meet our students' educational goals in the digital landscape. Despite concerns about "lost learning," our professional cohort



was determined to continue fostering academic growth and social engagement in the virtual environment.

Accountability is also paramount in strengthening the teaching profession. It entails being open to feedback from others, engaging in self-reflection on our daily practices, and embracing new strategies as needed. Teachers should establish clear expectations and goals for student learning, allowing them to assess their effectiveness through both informal and standardized testing. In my personal experience, I have found administering standardized assessments multiple times a year to be an invaluable tool for making data-driven decisions and evaluating the efficacy of my teaching practices. Regardless of the subject, specialized instructional program, or grade level, there are fundamental strategies that all teachers can employ to support student learning.

First and foremost, establishing positive relationships with students is essential in promoting social-emotional learning. When students feel seen, heard, and valued, they are more likely to be engaged in learning and experience success. Second, teachers should differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Differentiation may involve providing various levels of instructional materials within the same classroom, offering multiple avenues for students to demonstrate their understanding, and delivering targeted interventions for those in need of additional support. Finally, teachers should foster a positive growth mindset in their students by teaching them that intelligence and abilities can be developed through positive effort, persistence, and learning from mistakes. With this foundation, students are more likely to embrace challenges as opportunities and ultimately achieve success.

Being a teacher has been an immensely rewarding experience for me, and I wholeheartedly encourage others to join the profession. By doing so, we can contribute to expanding the positive impact of education in our society. We have a unique opportunity to enhance the lives of others through our teaching and support which enables our students to learn and grow into positive individuals ready to take their place in our collective future. Let us continue to collaborate, strengthen our profession, and uphold the noble mission of educating and empowering the next generation.



Jamie Davis

ELK GROVE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Union House Elementary School
4th Grade

It would be an honor to represent my school, district, state, and the teaching profession as the 2024 National Teacher of the Year. I am passionate, effective, and empathetic. I am a strong leader, mentor, and advocate for best practices.

Being a teacher is truly the best profession. It is incredibly challenging yet rewarding. Every day brings new joys, obstacles, and moments that forever shape the future of my students. No two days are the same, and that is part of why I love what I do. There is never a dull moment with a classroom full of fourth graders.

If selected as the 2024 National Teacher of the Year, I will use my platform to shine a light on the excellent work educators are doing, especially in schools with high populations of disadvantaged students. Teachers are not recognized often enough for their constant dedication to their students. The countless hours spent developing engaging and innovative lessons and the amount of planning that goes into differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners is something to be highlighted and celebrated. Like students, teachers are deserving of positive feedback to motivate them to continue to show up for our students.

As a mentor of aspiring and new educators, I am passionate about sharing and modeling effective teaching strategies and resources. I will continue to collaborate with fellow educators and share resources and ideas. I will continue to serve as a master teacher for college teaching candidates and as a mentor teacher



Philosophy of Teaching

for my district's teacher induction and peer assistance and review programs. Through mentorship and collaboration, I can impact more than just the students within my own classroom.

Teacher accountability must be measured by more than students' test scores. Peer observations are one way that teachers can be held accountable. These observations would be beneficial to all parties involved. There is so much to learn from our colleagues. Peer feedback can be incredibly powerful and perhaps more meaningful than feedback from administrators who are further removed from the classroom.

Educating the children in our country is our responsibility. Our children deserve highly qualified and empathetic educators, and our educators deserve support, respect, and praise. It would be an honor to share my message as the 2024 National Teacher of the Year.





Bill Garvey

SACRAMENTO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
SCBC and Senior Extension Program
Adults, Senior Extension

Way back when I was working through a teaching credential program, the popular push was for new teachers to learn to be “guides on the side” versus “sages on the stage” in the classroom. But what about all the great films about teachers? *The Miracle Worker*, *To Sir, With Love*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Dead Poets Society*? The teachers were the stars! Whether real-life or fictitious characters, all educators depicted in these films were certainly card-carrying members of the “sage” camp.

We should never discount our strengths and knowledge in the classroom, but over the years I have come to see the “guide” advice as another way of recommending teachers check their egos at the classroom door. This comes in handy when a student makes some unflattering remark about your hair, lack of hair, clothing, age, etc. We need to remember this real-life movie we’re in is always about the students. They are the main characters; they are the headliners.

I recommend teaching to anyone who sincerely wants to positively impact lives. Teachers don’t croon, “I believe the children are our future.” They live that sentiment each day. They are often exhausted at the end of many school days as more grading and lesson planning awaits once at home. But they also draw on the youthful energy of their students. I have sometimes thought of myself as a bit of an occupational vampire because the energy from students helps keep me younger, at least in spirit. Teachers spend their modest earnings on school supplies and other items for their students. Yet they walk away with treasure troves of memories.



Increased accountability in teaching needs to be juxtaposed with more support. Fortunately, the trend has moved away from state standardized testing as the primary accountability measure. We have myriad assessments to gauge students. Why wouldn't we do the same for teachers? We need to rely more on student and parent/guardian feedback about our teachers and increase administrative and peer classroom observations beyond those rare occasions that tend to lead to "dog and pony shows" versus an experience that is reflective of a normal classroom day. At the same time, we need to bolster our teachers through quality professional development, mentoring programs, and improved salaries.



Connect with colleagues. Research shows that people with more social connections tend to live longer. A teaching career will have longer life for those willing to ask for help as well as offer it. That's one of the more important things I have learned. When I was a kid, I loved the Joe South song "Walk a Mile in My Shoes." We need to do this with our colleagues, even the ones who irritate us. More importantly, we need to do this with our students.

Make a real connection with students, listen to them, "be here now" as Ram Dass once said. We need to be genuinely present to really see and hear them, especially with the mental health challenges plaguing our youth today. Checking all the boxes of a lesson just has to take a backseat sometimes.

Take risks and introduce a sense of adventure with your teaching. Whenever possible, take the kids outside for a lesson. When things go "off the rails," it can be a bit nerve-wracking, but it can also be ultimately so much more rewarding. And remember to get out of the way and let the real stars of the show shine.





Lyndsay Hall

ROBLA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Bell Avenue School

K-5th Grades, Professional Learning Support

“Teaching is never boring. Some days you instill life lessons in the generation that will one day run this nation. Other days you have to remind them to not lick the pencil sharpener.”

– Anonymous

Teaching is unlike any profession. As teachers we are tasked with not only being educators, but nurses, coaches, counselors, mentors, and so much more. Teaching is hard. There are moments where the weight on your shoulders feels too overwhelming. Self-care may look like sitting in the classroom in the dark during lunch recess eating chocolate, Googling, “How to become an interior designer.” Then there are these moments you wish you could capture: the moment when a student finally gets that long division strategy and you see their face light up or the moment a student runs across the playground shouting your name. They tell you how much they missed you, as they barrel into you for a hug. These are moments that remind you of why you are here, and why you chose this career. These are the reminders that you have chosen to be a part of one of the most valuable, rewarding, and honorable professions.

Supporting educators and classrooms is how I work to strengthen and improve the teaching profession. As a Professional Learning Support Teacher (PLST), I have the opportunity to work with both teachers and students across all the Robla District school sites, and at all grade levels. As a PLST, I co-teach with my colleagues, observe and contribute constructive feedback, as well as provide demo lessons. I assist



with planning, assessment support, and most importantly, being a source of emotional support. I understand the challenges and victories of teaching. I want to be there to celebrate my colleagues' successes, and provide a shoulder during the difficult moments. Teacher burnout is a real thing and seems to be getting worse and worse each year, particularly given the unprecedented impact of the pandemic. Building a strong community of teachers where we support each other with the emotional demands of the job, as well as with the professional expectations, is the best way to ensure that teaching remains a sustainable career.



I have taken advantage of the opportunity for teacher collaboration that comes with my role as a PLST, induction/intern mentor, and Teacher Curriculum Institute grade-level leader. The past few years I have helped lead New Teacher Orientation as well as run ongoing professional development, including report card training. This has allowed me to connect with new teachers and support them as they juggle the many demands of their first year. As educators we often close our doors which leads to feeling isolated within the four walls of our classrooms. I admit that is how I felt at the start of my career. I have learned over the years that our greatest resource is each other. I have learned so much through observing my colleagues, as well as being observed by others and given constructive feedback. I encourage teachers to open up their classrooms, to observe their colleagues, plan together, and to openly discuss their teaching practice.

Teacher accountability in our system should be about growth. Teachers are currently being observed once or twice a year. There is often pressure to throw in every teaching strategy we know or to make sure we are hitting every item on our administrator's checklist. These observations are often out of context, and do not lead to a true understanding of our needs as teachers. I am an advocate for more frequent observations. Observations should not be about what a teacher is lacking, but to focus on how they can improve and build upon their strengths. More frequent observations allow us to connect teachers with the correct support earlier. Our system should work to create a culture that encourages growth among teachers, to build both skills and confidence. As educators we want to improve student outcomes, and one of the most effective ways to do that is to support teachers.



Donja Harding

NATOMAS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Leroy Greene Academy
6th–12th Grades • History, Social Studies

I grew up in Oak Park during the 1960s when the Black Panther Party would distribute coloring books and deliver free lunches to the children in our neighborhood during the summers. I didn't realize we were poor until I was an adult reflecting on the fact that we ate "ice milk" (instead of ice cream) and smelt, a fish I later found out was more commonly used as bait. My mother was a master at making do, but she never skimped when it came to education. I remember her buying the precursor to the "Hooked on Phonics" series. I would sit on the floor listening to the records and following along with the brightly colored books, sounding out the words. Once I mastered those, my mother convinced my father to purchase a set of encyclopedias. The black and red volumes resided on a shelf, in plain sight, in our kitchen. I would randomly choose one and sit with my mother reading what I could with her filling in the rest. Then she would have me re-read the same paragraph until I had mastered it.

When my mother started a janitorial service, I spent a great deal of time with my grandmother. My grandmother was a tough woman who grew up in The South in the early 1900s. She told me she completed high school while my mother and aunt were in elementary school. Her education aside, my grandmother had rich and seasoned wisdom, so when she told me something, in my mind, it was true. My grandmother always said, "You need to learn as much as you can because once you know something, no one can take that knowledge away from you." In her mind, knowledge was precious, so it's true.

Knowledge is our understanding of the world around us. It is the acquisition of facts, theories, and concepts. It is what we learn through practice and repetition. Knowledge is applying



information and using experience to help in those applications. Knowledge enables us to make decisions that affect our lives in big and small ways. Knowledge is power, and as educators, we have



Philosophy of Teaching

a duty and responsibility to impart it. When we became teachers, we became the bastions of knowledge. It is our job to provide content that is accurate and objective. We cannot stand by and allow social media and Tik Tok to educate our youth. We are responsible for ensuring that our students are given opportunities to work toward mastery. To do this, we must make sure that our students are truly ready for the next lesson, the next unit, and the next grade. We have to put our students in positions to apply what we teach them by using real-world scenarios, creating cross-curricular projects, and taking them on field trips, even if they are virtual. Teachers are responsible for passing on knowledge and ensuring our students learn. No one should graduate with subpar reading, writing, or math skills.

We also must make sure that we continue to learn. To impart knowledge, we must have the knowledge to impart. As teachers, we must continue to be students, and as professionals, we are expected to continue to hone our crafts. Regardless of whether we are required to, we should take classes, attend conferences, read books, and confer with colleagues to keep abreast of the latest and greatest information and resources in our content areas. We should not find ourselves saying, "I've been teaching this the same way for ten years," because not only has the information changed, but so have the students. Just as we seek to create lifelong learners, we must be lifelong learners. The material and methods we use in our classrooms should reflect the students in them. We must choose texts that are culturally relevant, culturally accurate, and culturally appropriate. We must try to teach lessons that let our students know that who they are matters, that people just like them helped build this country, and that people just like them can make our country better.

It is said that knowledge is power because, without it, you are at the mercy of others. Knowledge is precious because my grandmother said so.



Elizabeth Isaacs

FOLSOM CORDOVA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Oak Chan Elementary School
Kindergarten

I was born to be a teacher. I grew up helping my mom post bulletin boards in her special education classroom at White Rock Elementary. I went with my dad to his Law School lectures at McGeorge School of Law. As an older sister, I annoyed my siblings with my constant need to play “school”; of course, I always got to be the teacher. With this love of education, I decided to begin my journey as an educator. I was so excited to start teaching that I signed up to become a substitute teacher before I started my credential program. My first day as a substitute was one of my most challenging days as an educator. While I knew that I loved being in a classroom, I had not yet learned the skills and techniques needed to be an effective educator. I will never forget the feeling of exhaustion that I felt at the end of that first day of substitute teaching. Ask any teacher, and we will tell you that teaching is not an easy job. It requires intelligence, thoughtfulness, and a craft that is perfected over years of practice. I am fortunate enough to have had a myriad of learning experiences that have helped me to become an outstanding teacher.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have faced numerous challenges in educating students. We saw our world turned upside down when we had to stay home, away from our students, in early 2020. We banded together and learned how to teach children using innovative technology while information was constantly changing, and politicians were making decisions that affected our daily lives.



We visited our students outside their homes and held drive-by parades in our school parking lots so that we could remain connected to the students who we love so much. We went back to work in-person and taught students while wearing masks. We kept children safe by teaching them how to wear their masks properly and socially distance. When students were back

in school, we increased our interventions and individualized instruction to target learning losses. We helped students recover academically and emotionally from a time that was confusing and scary to all of us. We kept our spirits high and showed our students how to be brave. With these challenges, one thing remained: our commitment to this profession and the love of our students. It was because of these things that we overcame one of the most challenging times in our careers.



Sadly, due to some of these challenges and other political and societal factors, teaching remains a profession that is underpaid and undervalued. Many of my colleagues have chosen to leave the profession. If we want to retain great teachers, we need to give teachers the support and respect that they deserve. I believe that we can decrease the teacher turnover rate if we give teachers the appropriate assistance, tools, and funding to do their jobs effectively—whether this be additional mentoring programs for new teachers, more funding for mental health and Social Emotional Learning programs, or additional staff and professional development to provide research-based teaching techniques.

In my role as a mentor at my school, I have recognized the importance of providing new teachers with someone to guide them through their teaching career. I feel empowered when I share best practices and strategies with my teaching partners. I am proud of my fellow teachers and myself when we learn new research-based strategies and implement them with our students. It feels good to show teachers how they can make a difference in a child's life. When I mentored student teachers, I was reminded of my early days as a substitute teacher. In being a role model, mentor and sounding board for new teachers, it helps to provide support that they so desperately need. I am encouraged that Folsom Cordova will be hiring and providing more instructional coaches this year. When teachers feel like our voices are heard, we feel respected. Having mentors to guide new teachers is one part of demonstrating that respect.

Our profession is one of the most critical careers in our modern society. I am extremely lucky to work with such wonderful colleagues in education throughout my school and district. I am continually inspired and motivated by my fellow teachers. I see teachers who are committed to improving the lives of students regularly. It is through this commitment and cooperative spirit that we can make positive influences in the lives of all our children.



Gemma Jauregui

CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Language Academy of Sacramento

8th Grade • Spanish, Language Arts, and Math

As the 2024 National Teacher of the Year, I am deeply committed to upholding The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession, which encompass Care, Respect, Trust, and Integrity. These principles form the foundation of my teaching approach, and I am dedicated to imparting these values to my students and the broader learning community.

First and foremost, I prioritize care. In my classroom, I foster an environment where students feel a genuine sense of compassion, acceptance, and empathy. When students step into my classroom, they know they are in a space where they are valued and seen as individuals who matter. Additionally, I extend this care to my fellow staff members, providing them with support and being a reliable resource when needed. I take pride in building deep connections that go beyond surface-level interactions, as I believe in getting to know people on a personal level. These connections enable me to provide meaningful support to both students and colleagues. I firmly believe that before imparting academic knowledge, students must feel the love and care of their teacher.

Respect for the teaching profession is a core value that fuels my passion. Teachers have an immense responsibility not only to educate our youth but also to instill in them a love for themselves and their abilities. Every child has the ability to reach their highest potential, and it is our duty to empower them to

always strive for their best. I ensure that my students feel respected, and the fact that they trust me is evident when they eagerly wait by my door to share their weekend experiences or simply engage in heartfelt conversations. It is not uncommon for students to mistake me for their “mom” due to the deep bond we have developed. This ongoing confusion indicates that students genuinely



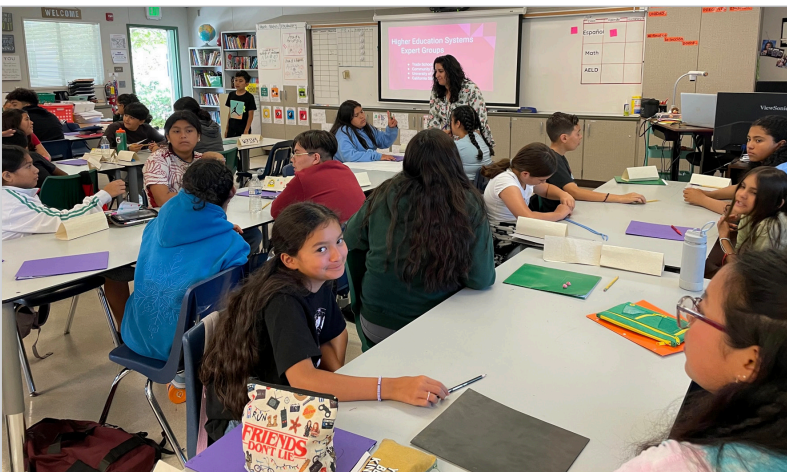
respect and care for me as an individual. As students spend a significant portion of their day with me, I hold high expectations for their behavior, cooperation, and dedication, much like a “teacher mom” would.

One of my goals is to foster collaboration among teachers across grade levels. I firmly believe that working together is essential for achieving growth and success across all levels. Every grade-level teacher plays a vital role in the development and achievements of students. To support this collaboration, I encourage open dialogue and the sharing of experiences. We can begin by simply opening our classroom doors to others on our campus, thereby demystifying the stigma surrounding “my classroom” and embracing the idea that these students are collectively “ours.” By adopting this mindset, we can bring about noticeable changes in our educational practices.

In my role as a literacy coach, I am confident in my ability to contribute to these endeavors. This position has provided me with opportunities to work with diverse grade levels, students, administrators, and personalities. I have experienced firsthand the incredible work that our students and teachers produce on a daily basis, ranging from foundational reading skills in kindergarten to critical analysis and source evaluation in eighth grade. The scope of the work I am involved in is remarkable, and it has highlighted the importance of addressing social justice issues in our classrooms.

Ensuring that our curriculum reflects the diversity and experiences of our students is paramount. If our classrooms fail to mirror the students we serve, we must make necessary changes to our books, readings, and discussions. Our students deserve to be in an environment where they are not merely tolerated but truly valued and respected.

By embodying the principles of Care, Respect, Trust, and Integrity, I am committed to making a lasting impact as the National Teacher of the Year. I will continue to advocate for social justice, promote collaboration, and ensure that all students feel valued and empowered in their educational journey.





Rebecca Jones

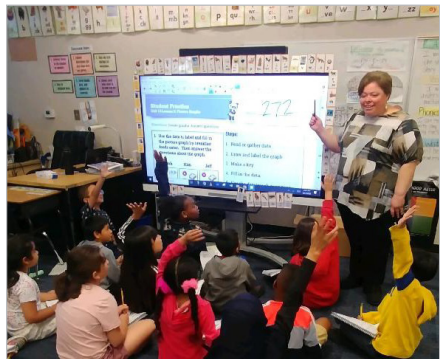
TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Woodlake Elementary School
2nd Grade

Being a teacher in the 21st century is different than fifty or even twenty-three years ago. There are different challenges and problems in today's world. Even with the challenges teachers face today—or will face in the next ten years—the teaching profession is still a noble and important career to pursue.

If someone is considering this career they need to have strong values, skills, and a knowledge of this profession. Now more than ever teachers need to be critical thinkers. Every year new students enter a classroom with different abilities. Teachers need to be able to consider what's in their students' best interests while also working within their institution's goals and standards. Teachers need to have a safe and nurturing environment where they model patience. Patience is the heart of a student's long-term retention of content and skills. Teachers need to have strong values that include integrity, fairness, responsibility, compassion, hard work, kindness, cooperation, and many more. They need to know content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and practice classroom management skills.

The public needs to know that a teacher is one of the most important members of our society. Not only do they give children purpose, they set them up for success as citizens of our world. Teachers inspire children every day to do their best and succeed in life. They can act as a support system where one may be lacking in students' lives. Teachers can be an inspiration to children by telling them they can go farther and dream bigger than they already do. They hold students accountable for their successes and failures. The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and without strong teachers our future will not be the future that we envision for our children and grandchildren.

More men and women should consider entering this wonderful career for many reasons. This profession is an outlet for creativity. Teachers design their own classrooms and create lesson plans for their students. They influence many students and colleagues throughout their years of service.





When they see a student perform or excel at their level, teachers go home with a sense of pride.

The teaching profession needs to be recognized and strengthened. There are many misconceptions floating around about this career choice. It is not an easy profession, but it is worth every minute. One way teachers can strengthen the profession is through communication. Teachers do a great job sending emails, texts, and newsletters, but this too often results in a one-way conversation. Teachers should talk with parents and have a dialogue about their students' struggles and strengths. Teachers need to connect with community leaders and bring them into the classroom to engage with students of today.

If teachers share with other teachers and the community about the changes they have made in the lives of their students, it will help to increase awareness of the importance of the teaching profession. We hear all too much about the negative aspects of a teacher's day-to-day work experience—people need to hear about the positive aspects. The more teachers share with other professionals about the teaching profession, including the ups and downs, the better people will understand what we do.

One way I have found to help strengthen the teaching profession is through leadership and mentoring. At Woodlake Elementary we have taken an approach to help all students improve their individual level of reading. I stepped up and became a strong advocate to help other teachers organize and implement our structured reading time. I took it upon myself to help teachers who were new to the program or struggling with understanding the process of the SIIPS program. When I mentor others, I feel that I have a greater purpose and am more fulfilled in my life. I am appreciative when others take it upon themselves to mentor me and together, helping each other, we can help the teaching profession grow and become stronger.

All teachers should be held accountable by making, keeping, and managing agreements and expectations. Every two years we are evaluated and set goals for ourselves. There are a lot of expectations in the teaching profession which can become very overwhelming. Setting goals in a few areas each year helps all of us become better teachers throughout our many years of service.



Kyle McDaniel

TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Grant Union High School
9th–12th Grades • Biology and Advanced Placement Biology,
Anatomy, and Physiology

It is with utmost gratitude and a profound sense of responsibility that I stand before you as the 2024 National Teacher of the Year. This esteemed recognition has granted me the privilege of serving as a spokesperson and representative for the remarkable teaching profession that shapes the minds and futures of our nation's youth.

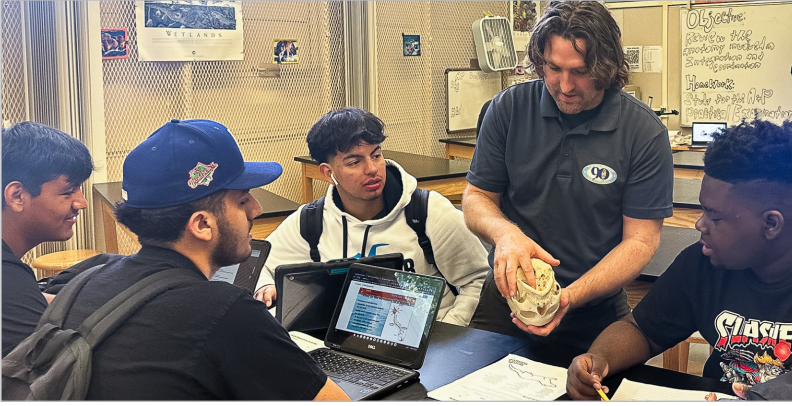
While I am from a large urban high school in Sacramento, I have extensive experience working in rural, intimate, and complex educational settings, and I am well prepared to support diverse teaching environments and demographics. My message and platform are rooted in the belief that education is the key to unlocking the boundless potential within each and every student. As an ambassador for outstanding practices, subjects, and classrooms spanning pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, I am committed to promoting excellence and equity in education.

As your representative, I embody the essential skills, values, knowledge, and ethics crucial to the field of education. My skills include pedagogical expertise, effective communication, adaptability, technological proficiency, and collaboration. I am guided by values of equity, respect, integrity, lifelong learning, and empathy. My knowledge encompasses subject-matter expertise, educational research, and cultural competence. I adhere to ethical principles of confidentiality, professionalism, accountability, a student-centered approach, and safety. Through these attributes, I strive to inspire educators nationwide, foster educational excellence, and champion equitable opportunities for all students, leaving a lasting impact on their lives.

I want to emphasize the transformative power of education and its profound impact on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. I encourage educators to believe in their ability to make a difference, to embrace innovation, and to foster a love for learning in every student. I invite the public to recognize and appreciate the invaluable work of teachers, advocating for increased support and investment in education.



Philosophy of Teaching



Together, let us celebrate the boundless potential of every learner and the vital role of educators in shaping a brighter future.

I wholeheartedly recommend individuals to enter the teaching profession for the profound impact they can have on shaping young minds and making a difference in the world. Teaching offers the opportunity to inspire and empower future generations, ignite a passion for learning, and cultivate critical thinking skills. It allows individuals to be agents of change, fostering equity and social justice in classrooms and communities. The teaching profession is a rewarding journey of growth, continuous learning, and meaningful connections with students. It is a chance to leave a lasting legacy and contribute to a brighter future for our society.

Throughout my service as your educational ambassador, I will strengthen and improve the teaching profession through increased investment in professional development, elevating the status of teachers, fostering collaboration and innovation, and advocating for fair compensation and working conditions. By supporting and empowering teachers, we can attract and retain highly skilled educators who will inspire future generations.

I believe accountability in the teaching profession should be holistic, considering classroom observations, student growth, feedback, professional development, and community contributions. It should go beyond test scores and promote a collaborative culture of continuous improvement for both teachers and students. Representing America's teaching profession in the post COVID-19 pandemic world, I will prioritize equitable access to resources, advocate for comprehensive health measures, and support innovative teaching strategies. Together we will adapt, persevere, and prioritize the safety and success of all our students.

In summary, as the 2024 National Teacher of the Year, my message and platform revolve around empowering learners, inspiring excellence, and fostering equity. Let us embark on this journey of educational transformation, driven by a shared vision of a brighter future. By working together, we can unleash the potential of our students, uplift our communities, and shape a nation that cherishes the transformative power of education. Thank you, and let us strive for excellence in education for all.



Nicole Quinn

SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Washington Elementary School
6th Grade

This job is difficult. There's no way around this fact. I have days where I leave the classroom feeling empowered to take on the world and other days where I dream of applying for a job at Costco. Teaching is the most difficult yet most wonderfully challenging job that I could ever have the pleasure of calling my profession for the past twenty-one years. If I could convey any message to the public and/or educators, both present and future, it would be that of joy. Classrooms and school campuses have the potential to be incubators of joy.

Joy comes in many forms: celebrations of culture, daily opportunities to connect, laughter, rich and meaningful literature, smiles that return to a face after a student overcomes a struggle. There are so many moments and opportunities for joy, and, consequently, opportunities for disconnect and apathy. These negative feelings, while in numbers are fewer, weigh heavily on a school culture and can quickly shift the narrative in a destructive way.

I am lucky enough to work at a school that is filled with joy. There is joy emanating from my students because they are given the opportunity to grow and hone their agency. They are change-makers. They advocate for their communities. It is my job to deliver academic and social-emotional content, but then I sit back and let them choose how they will use that knowledge to make our world a better place.

That is what our educational setting needs. Teachers who believe in their students to such a degree that they pause and remove themselves from the application of their students' learning. That ideal, right? Sadly, teachers can't do that on



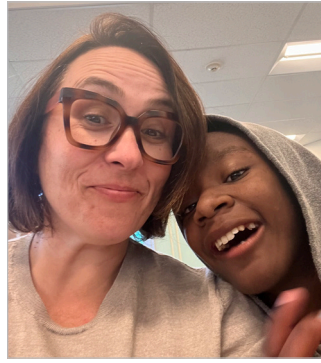
Philosophy of Teaching

their own. While it takes teachers believing in their students, it also requires administrators and district officials to believe in their teachers.

Teachers don't need new and fancy curriculum to be their best. We don't need standardized tests to prove we have done our job. We need exactly what students need. We need support in delivering the most meaningful and authentic academic content. That does not come from delivering a scripted curriculum. It comes from meaningful professional development designed to help teachers create learning opportunities that are built around the experiences of their students—lessons that reflect social justice and are free of biases.

Students need teachers who can pause and be vulnerable enough to look at their teaching through the lenses of their students and families. Teachers need the same. We need administrators and district officials who are vulnerable enough to pause and look at their job through the lenses of their teachers. They need to build school systems with teachers and not for teachers. This, in turn, would allow teachers the opportunity to build learning with their students and families, not for them. Too much of what we do in our profession is “for” and not “with.”

As the National Teacher of Year, I would convey the importance of the joy that is built through collaboration, both in the classroom and in the profession. How do we build learning environments where everyone's story and voice are valued and leveraged? That is really where change happens in a school system. We are not the experts when it comes to the students in our classrooms. Students and their families are the experts. I encourage all new teachers to make that their mindset when they enter the profession. We need to ask questions and lean into the answers.





Susan Sloan

SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Bella Vista High School

9th–12th Grades • Teacher Librarian

As a teacher, I get to be a part of developing the minds, skills, and talents of our students. Just being a part of that process is exceptionally rewarding. Having taught Environmental Science, German, and currently a Teacher Librarian, some of my former students are now teachers in all three disciplines. Just a few weeks ago, I had a parent who is also a teacher in the district reach out to me and ask, “How can I become a librarian like you?” My own daughter completed her science teaching credential and her master’s in teaching just last year. I enjoy what I do and lead by example. That is the best way I can encourage others to enter the profession.

I saw a quote by a fellow Teacher Librarian, Kristine Holzweiss, whom I follow and admire, “Libraries give voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and hope to the hopeless.” That really made an impression on me and has given me that extra spark to keep going even when I am tired, or frustrated or saddened by a student’s choice. I would expand on that quote and say that powerful, engaging, and meaningful teaching can do the same things and so much more.

Over the years, I have contributed to the profession in a variety of ways. I have worked to strengthen and improve the profession by helping to prepare new teachers in the credential program. I served as an adjunct faculty member for Chapman University teaching in their credential program with students working on their single subject world languages credential. I have also worked with new teachers as a Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment provider. Additionally, I worked with more experienced teachers as part of the San Juan Unified System of Professional Growth facilitator program. As teacher librarians are a unique group with unique teaching challenges,



I was part of forming a learning team for teacher librarians to meet and collaborate monthly. This group has now expanded beyond the borders of the district and assists teacher librarians from neighboring districts as well. We are all working to improve and strengthen the profession through our daily efforts to bring the best resources and library programming to the thousands of students we serve.



Collaboration isn't just something that happens between the teacher librarians. I collaborate with teachers across the content-area departments at Bella Vista High School as well. I have even collaborated with some unexpected content areas such as Math and PE. In partnership with the content teachers, students participate in a wide variety of projects and assignments in the library. Some focus on our print resources, some focus on databases and online resources. This necessitates instruction in digital literacy – which I have a special class authorization to teach. Students are instructed in how to vet online resources for currency, accuracy, reliability, bias, etc. I have worked with several teachers specifically on the topics of fake news, confirmation bias, and website evaluation. Having established many successful collaborations with veteran teachers has provided the opportunity for them to share their experiences with new members of their departments. New teachers are quickly introduced to me so that I can mentor them through an established lesson or to meet with them about a new project that they want to try.

One collaboration that I am particularly proud of involves working with the counseling staff and the English department as our students progress through a 4-year sequence of lessons that deals with learning styles, personal inventories, the use of the Naviance system, college and career readiness, etc. This program was one part of the threeprong approach that earned Bella Vista the Gold Ribbon award. This was a result of my leadership and collaboration skills in bringing these staff members and resources together in the most efficient and meaningful way possible. End-of-the-year surveys with our Seniors indicate that this program is a highlight of their high school experience.

Realizing the need to quantify teacher success for accountability purposes, the system should measure growth for each child each year. Being able to provide an environment that allows a 5th grader who enters a classroom reading at a 3rd grade level and leaves reading closer to a 5th grade level is huge. While the other students might be ready for 6th grade reading, that specific student has made significant growth while also receiving a boost to their self-esteem. That, to me, is accountability—and that should be celebrated.



Brandy Ventittelli

CENTER JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Oak Hill Elementary School
6th Grade

From the time we are capable of conscious thought, we think about the future. When young, this comes in the form of wishing about birthdays or holidays. As we mature it evolves into dreams and aspirations of who or what we will become. Teaching is the future. Every day an educator steps into a classroom, they are influencing the future. Each child's future depends on each teacher's interactions and collectively these all become our future. With this in mind, how can we have a teacher shortage? According to National High School Statistics, every year over three million students graduate high school in the United States. On average each student has been in contact with over 50 teachers during the course of their education. We need to consider why more graduates aren't interested in a career in education.

For this we need to look at why teaching is not a desirable career. My own children have mentioned that dealing with undesirable student behaviors is why they wouldn't teach. I have witnessed a new teacher struggling in dealing with student behaviors. There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration to rectify these behaviors. Each individual needs to be looked at separately, as their situation is unique. Some can be resolved by parent involvement or simple parent contact. In my classroom I invite parents to come observe. Parents can see how the classroom runs and how their child interacts within the classroom and with their peers. During this observation the behaviors are either prevalent or they cease with parental presence and then we can look at how to proceed. Collectively, the student, parent, and I can come up with a plan for student success. Having a strong parent-teacher relationship is key in strengthening education and minimizing undesirable student behaviors.

Another thing to take into consideration is the isolation of a career in teaching. A lot of time is spent unaided in the profession, sometimes feeling unsupported. New teachers, especially, require guidance as they find their footing in education. It is pertinent that veteran educators step up and assist those new to the profession.





At my school I support new teachers and new teammates. As team lead, I attend meetings and bring information back to my grade-level, lead collaborations, assist in lesson planning, and ordering of materials—thus, allowing my new team members time to acclimate to the curriculum. I also volunteer to be a supervising teacher to those completing phases of student teaching and have recently been asked to be a mentor teacher through SCOE's Teacher Induction Program. I know guidance and support are vital to sustaining the longevity of highly qualified teachers, and that is why I provide it every chance I can. It is important to remember those with seniority require a different type of support. Teachers can feel burnt out and in need of mental health support, especially post COVID-19. Educators are reeling in the aftermath post-pandemic both personally and professionally. We are dealing with issues never before encountered with behaviors, attendance, and academic and emotional deficits with students. In addition, teachers are also struggling with our own mental well-being as the role of parent, counselor, psychologist, and behaviorist all fall on our shoulders while trying to foster what students lost during the year and a half they were forced to learn from home. We can support each other through collaboration, peer interactions, and team bonding. A horseback riding event I planned for my staff is a great example of this. Individuals reminisced about it all year. Simple things like these can make a huge difference in our mental health and sustain our morale.

There are times when teachers are left to their own accountability. Although we're professionals and can generally regulate our expectations, everyone needs some basis of accountability at times. Timelines and due dates are important in keeping with prioritization and time management. When it comes to teacher performance, we should each hold ourselves to a higher standard than the layman. However, basing performance on student scores is not always a fair basis unless we look at student progress rather than mastery. Individuals who come to this profession should already possess a strong work ethic. Teaching requires time, care, organization, thoughtfulness, good communication skills, planning, flexibility, patience, and a plethora of other skills not needed in other industries. This is a very rewarding career for those who want not only what is best for all children, but who also want to invest in the future.

From the SCOE School of Education

Launched in 2014, SCOE's School of Education includes a variety of professional learning opportunities and programs to support the region's teachers and leaders as they earn their teaching and administrative credentials and develop their leadership capacity. The School of Education is accredited by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and is comprised of two divisions: Teaching and Leading.

TEACHING DIVISION

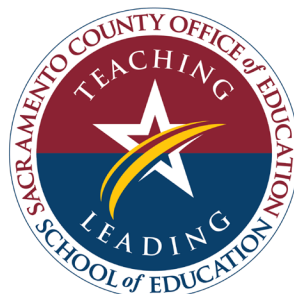
The **Teacher Intern Program** is an alternative, two-year pathway to a Single Subject Math/Science, Multiple Subject, or Mild to Moderate Support Needs Education Specialist Preliminary Credential. Successful completion of both the Intern Pre-service Program and the Intern Program is required to earn a Preliminary Credential. The **Teacher Residency Program** is an innovative teacher preparation program built upon an accelerated course of study centered around a year-long student teaching placement at a single school site. The **Teacher Induction Program** provides a two-year course of study enabling teachers to clear their General Education or Education Specialist Credential. Both Teacher Intern and Teacher Induction participants have an opportunity to earn a master's degree in Teaching and Learning through our partnership with UMass Global.

LEADING DIVISION

The Leadership Institute's **Preliminary Administrative Services Credential Program** (one year) provides an opportunity for those interested in educational leadership to earn a Preliminary Administrative Services Credential. Additionally, candidates have an opportunity to earn a master's degree in Applied Leadership through SCOE's partnership with National University. The two-year **Clear Administrative Services Credential Program** focuses on the development of newly hired administrators through assessment, coaching, and professional development. The **21st Century CA School Leadership Academy (21CSLA)** supports teacher, site, and central office leaders through professional learning opportunities aimed at developing their capacity to lead for equity, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

For more information, contact the School of Education at (916) 228-2537 or by email at schoolofeducation@scoe.net.

www.scoeschoolofed.net



Why We Teach

Essays

2024 Teachers of the Year

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Participating Teachers and Districts

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Teaching for Tolerance (Fall 2014)

learningforjustice.org

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Photos and video from the 2024 Teachers of the Year Recognition Banquet on August 25, 2023, are available for viewing on the Sacramento County Office of Education website:

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