



PRESS RELEASE

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2023-24 San Diego County Teachers of the Year Announced *Five Educators from Around the Region Now in the Running for State Title*

Five local educators representing schools in Chula Vista, El Cajon, Escondido, and Poway have been named San Diego County Teachers of the Year. The honorees were announced at a reception Friday night as part of the 33rd annual “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers,” presented by San Diego County Credit Union in partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE).

The 2023-24 San Diego County Teachers of the Year are:

- **Christina Bass**, Painted Rock Elementary, Poway Unified School District – 3rd grade
- **Courtney Coffin**, Orange Glen High School, Escondido Union High School District – grades 9 through 12, all subjects, life skills, and community-based instruction
- **Amanda Ford**, Flying Hills School of the Arts (previously Rancho San Diego Elementary), Cajon Valley Union School District – 7th grade reading, history, social and emotional learning, World of Work, and visual and performing arts
- **Wendy Threatt**, Felicita Elementary, Escondido Union School District – 4th grade
- **Melanie Villanueva**, Sweetwater Union High School District - previously 8th grade science at Hilltop Middle, now teacher on special assignment at district office

“Teachers are at the heart of our education system. They educate, guide, and nurture our children, and create learning environments in which all students belong and can thrive,” said Dr. Paul Gothold, San Diego County superintendent of schools. “We appreciate the hard work and dedication of all the teachers honored tonight and their 23,000 colleagues across the county. It’s an honor to recognize these amazing educators and individuals.”

The five Teachers of the Year will represent San Diego County in the California Teacher of the Year program. The state winners will be announced in October.

In partnership with SDCOE, Cox Communications will produce “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers,” a 30-minute television special that will spotlight the current and new teachers of the year and share highlights from the reception. 2022 County Teacher of the Year Xye Sanders will serve as host. The show will premiere at a date to be determined in October on YurView Network (Cox Channel 4) and will replay several times in October and November.



“For 33 years, Cox has partnered with the San Diego County Office of Education to salute our public school teachers, and this year was another exciting and inspirational evening as the five new county teachers of the year were announced,” said Chanelle Hawken, vice president of government and public affairs for Cox Communications. “As the wife of a teacher, I’ve seen firsthand how dedicated and hardworking our teachers are. Cox is proud to celebrate and thank them for helping their students reach for the stars.”

“SDCCU is proud to be the presenting sponsor of Salute to Teachers and congratulates the five San Diego County Teachers of the Year for being selected for this honor,” said SDCCU President and CEO Teresa Campbell. “We applaud their commitment to educating our future leaders, and celebrate all teachers for their dedication to their students and the important work they do.”

The 2023-24 County Teachers of the Year were chosen from among 44 teachers nominated by their school districts for their commitment to students, teaching, and continued growth and development. The winners were selected based on a review of their applications and interviews by a panel made up of former County Teachers of the Year, district and county office of education administrators, and a PTA representative. They were chosen based on student achievement, professional development and school community involvement, teaching philosophy, knowledge of educational issues and trends, promotion and development of the teaching profession, and ability to serve as ambassadors of education.

Since 1974, 196 teachers have been named San Diego County Teacher of the Year. Of those, 23 were named California Teacher of the Year, and three went on to be named National Teacher of the Year.

In addition to the show’s producers, Cox Communications and the San Diego County Office of Education, supporters of “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” include presenting sponsor San Diego County Credit Union, Murray Lampert, Procopio, Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, Oggi’s, Meritage Wine Market, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, The Mightier 1090, and KPBS.

Brief bios of the five San Diego County Teachers of the Year are included below along with a testimonial. Photos may be found on the [SDCOE website](#) or link to this [Google folder for higher resolution images](#), as well as [a full list of the 44 nominees](#) from whom the five County Teachers of the Year were selected.

2023-24 San Diego County Teachers of the Year Biographies and Testimonials

Christina Bass, Painted Rock Elementary School, Poway Unified School District

Christina Bass is a 3rd grade teacher at Painted Rock Elementary School and has taught in the Poway Unified School District for more than a decade. She believes in developing meaningful relationships with families, colleagues, administrators, community members, and most of all, students to achieve this notion.

“Mrs. Bass is always willing to learn new skills and strategies to better her teaching practice,” wrote Principal Andrew Gergurich in his recommendation letter for Bass. He adds, “The support she has provided her team and other staff members has greatly improved the teaching of reading both in whole class and in small group settings across Painted Rock.”

Courtney Coffin, Orange Glen High School, Escondido Union High School District

Orange Glen High School teacher Courtney Coffin describes an ideal, and real, day in her classroom as “one where every student has exactly what they need to fully participate in instruction that is both accessible and challenging.” She teaches functional academics to 9th-12th grade students with moderate to severe disabilities, calling it her passion and love.

In her recommendation letter, Escondido Union High School District Superintendent Anne Staffieri said, "Courtney provides an instructional environment filled with positivity and safety, where students succeed in large part due to her dedication and the strong relationships formed not only with each student, but also with their families as educational partners."

Amanda Ford, Flying Hills School of the Arts (formerly Rancho San Diego Elementary School), Cajon Valley School District

Amanda Ford recently joined Flying Hills School of the Arts as a 7th grade teacher. In her 14 years at Rancho San Diego Elementary School in the Cajon Valley Union School District where she taught 5th grade, Ford had a keen, student-focused classroom philosophy. She says, "When kids feel the benefits of a positive classroom culture, the outcome is exciting to watch. My students take risks because having a nurturing environment allows them to feel safe. This lends to higher academic and social emotional growth."

Describing Ford in her nomination letter, Rancho San Diego Elementary School Principal Cherie Wall had high praise but said, "Most of all, she always demonstrates genuine love and respect for her students. Mrs. Ford truly strives to develop happy kids, in healthy relationships, on a path to gainful employment each day."

Wendy Threatt, Felicita Elementary School, Escondido Union School District

Wendy Threatt isn't bound by the walls of her 4th grade class at Felicita Elementary School in the Escondido Union School District. She says, "I will always reach beyond the doors of my classroom and curriculum to meet the needs of my students, whether it's supplies or experiences." Threatt adds, "I always gravitated toward teaching. Simply, I was born to be a teacher... but also a lifelong learner."

Felicita Elementary School Principal Marty Hranek praised Threatt in his recommendation letter, noting that she "has gained an outstanding reputation in the school and district for pursuing collaborative efforts that move district and state systems forward." In addition, he said, "She has inspired teachers and administrators around the school district to expand the 'Girls on the Run' program, impacting the lives of hundreds of students."

Melanie Villanueva, District Office (previously 8th Grade Science, Hilltop Middle School), Sweetwater Union High School District

Melanie Villanueva says, "Teaching is not just a profession for me - it's a passion, and my love for students and their learning keeps me in the classroom to this day." The passion comes with a purpose as the 8th grade science teacher at Hilltop Middle School in the Sweetwater Union High School District (now a teacher on special assignment) adds, "The best way to close achievement gaps is by providing high-quality instruction and helping students learn to believe in themselves and their abilities."

"Whenever I visit her classrooms, her students are engaged as you hear them conversing academically with each other and participating in activities she has designed and aligned with appropriate grade-level standards," recalled Hilltop Middle School Principal Easter Finley in her recommendation of Villanueva. "Her impact begins in the classroom and spills over the entire school, which in turn, influences our community to be a safe place for learning."

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About the San Diego County Office of Education

The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) is inspiring and leading innovation in education so that all students can thrive in a future without boundaries. The County Office helps the county's school districts operate

efficiently and with significant cost savings by leveraging resources to perform personnel tasks and provide staff development and other services. With a focus on equity, innovation, and career technical education, SDCOE directly educates more than 3,000 students at more than 20 sites each year and provides support services to more than 500,000 students across 42 school districts. For additional information on how SDCOE is innovating education and working to guarantee all students graduate prepared for college, career, and life, visit www.sdcoe.net.