



PRESS RELEASE

Sept. 10, 2021
For Immediate Release

Contact: Jennifer Rodriguez
Phone: 858-295-6633

2021-22 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 Santee, Lemon Grove, Ramona, Escondido, and Oceanside have been named San Diego County Teachers of the Year. The honorees were announced at a reception Friday night as part of the 31st annual “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers,” brought to you by San Diego County Credit Union.

The 2021-22 San Diego County Teachers of the Year are:

- **Tiffany Jokerst**, West Hills High School, Grossmont Union High School District
- **Jacquelyn Jourdane**, San Altos Elementary School, Lemon Grove School District
- **Heather McClain**, James Dukes Elementary School, Ramona Unified School District
- **Laura Reyes**, Central Elementary School, Escondido Union School District
- **Xye Sanders**, César Chávez Middle School, Oceanside Unified School District

“As we face another year in this pandemic, teachers continue to go above and beyond for their students. They work tirelessly to make sure students’ social and emotional needs are cared for while providing the supports they need to participate and succeed in school,” said Dr. Paul Gothold, San Diego County superintendent of schools. “San Diego County teachers are talented. They are dedicated. And they are resilient. It’s an honor to be recognizing these amazing educators and individuals.”

In partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education, Cox Communications will produce a one-hour “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” television special to recognize local teachers, spotlight the teachers of the year, and share highlights from the reception. The show will air at 9 p.m. Oct. 17 on YurView Network (Cox Channel 4 and 1004 in high definition) and will replay several times in October and November.

“Cox is proud of our 31-year partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education to recognize our local public school teachers. Their commitment to their students, especially during the pandemic, has been awe-inspiring,” said Ingo Hentschel, senior vice president and region manager for Cox Communications. ““Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers”” is a way for the community to say ‘thank you’ to our teachers, and we’re excited to highlight their passion for teaching, dedication to their students and creativity in the classroom.”

“SDCCU congratulates the five San Diego County Teachers of the Year for their dedication to students and for going above and beyond in the classroom,” said SDCCU President & CEO Teresa Campbell. “As the presenting sponsor of Salute to Teachers, we celebrate all teachers for their hard work and commitment to education and shaping the future of today’s youth.”



The 2021-22 County Teachers of the Year were chosen from among 33 teachers nominated by their school districts for their commitment to students, teaching, and lifelong learning. 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, school and county office of education administrators, and a PTA representative. They were chosen based on school-community involvement, teaching philosophy, knowledge of current issues and trends in education, promotion and development of the teaching profession, school culture, and ability to serve as ambassadors of education.

The County Teacher of the Year program also includes the selection of five finalists: **Tic Srinialack**, Potter Junior High School, Fallbrook Union Elementary School District; **Ana Nosal**, Mount Miguel High School, Grossmont Union High School District; **Amy Wert**, Ira Harbison Elementary School, National School District; **Francia Pinillos**, T.R.A.C.E. Alternative School, San Diego Unified School District; and **Sharon Apple**, Hoover High School, San Diego Unified School District.

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 next month. Since 1974, 186 teachers have been named San Diego County Teacher of the Year. Of those, 22 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, Procopio, KPBS, iHeart Radio, The Mightier 1090, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, and San Diego Magazine.

Brief bios of the five San Diego County Teachers of the Year are included below and photos may be found [here](#). You may view [here](#) a full list of the 33 nominees from whom the five County Teachers of the Year were selected.

2021-22 San Diego County Teachers of the Year Biographies and Testimonials

Tiffany Jokerst, grades 9-12, West Hills High School, Grossmont Union High School District

Tiffany Jokerst teaches mathematics and engineering to students in grades nine through 12 at West Hills High School in the Grossmont Union High School District. To get her students past their fear of math, Jokerst builds relationships through endearing interaction, humorous activities (ask her about disco polynomial day), and facilitating discussions beyond math – all to create a safe environment where students can take risks, learn from one another, and thrive. She says her greatest reward in teaching is watching students who were apprehensive about math evolve into optimistic, confident math learners. “When I create experiences that draw from real-life scenarios, each student is drawn into the conversation and can contribute, and find success, despite their background knowledge. Uniqueness is celebrated in my class daily,” the teacher of 15 years said. “Students have commented that before my class, they always felt that math should be done in one way, but now they strive to be the student that finds a different way to solve problems.”

From Anna, a student of three years

“Mrs. Jokerst without fail made sure myself and each of her students felt welcome, and ensured they had a safe, comfortable place to learn. She greeted our class every morning with energy and enthusiasm to teach and made learning in her class fun and something I looked forward to daily.”

Jacquelyn Jourdane, second grade, San Altos Elementary School, Lemon Grove School District

For Jacquelyn Jourdane, who teaches second grade at San Altos Elementary School in the Lemon Grove School District, being of mixed ethnicity, growing up around teachers, and having a disabled father shaped her views and inspired her to become a teacher. Pulling from her own experiences, she teaches students the values of equity, discipline, empathy, determination, and compassion at a young age so they can get ahead in life and use their knowledge to make people's lives better. "All students are capable if they are given the tools and support," Jourdane said. "Students are better to one another because they have learned to share their feelings and interact with one another in an empathetic and caring manner." As a former César Chávez Service Clubs coordinator, the teacher of 10 years encourages her students and their families to volunteer and take care of their communities. She has infused that spirit onto the school campus, where she replaced faded bulletin boards with information about young poet Amanda Gorman, social and emotional learning, COVID-19 safety, and reading. She has also partnered with the Anti-Defamation League to implement the No Place for Hate program on her school campus.

From Kelli Yale, first grade teacher at San Altos Elementary School

"Jackie is a champion for her students. She recognizes challenges but builds on strengths. Her classroom is dynamic, colorful, and full of samples celebrating all levels of work. There is a buzz of activity as kids rotate through blended learning stations and get intensive support with reading and math skills that are individualized to meet targeted needs. Ms. Jourdane spends quality time to build an important sense of classroom community forged by restorative circles. Kids know they belong."

Heather McClain, second grade, James Dukes Elementary School, Ramona Unified School District

When you enter Heather McClain's second grade class at James Dukes Elementary in the Ramona School District, you become a member of her ohana, which means "family" in Hawaiian. To her students, it means no one gets left behind or forgotten and everyone is treated with respect and compassion. They laugh, learn, struggle, and persevere together as they overcome the challenges of hybrid learning and pandemic life and focus on second grade. She uses her own experiences as a military child growing up all over the world to teach students about overcoming challenges and to value the beliefs and traditions of people with different backgrounds. "I want my student to know that what they learn connects them to each other. I want them to know that learning never stops and that their own backgrounds, opinions, and ideas have value. My greatest purpose as an educator is to prepare my students for life beyond the classroom walls."

From Theresa Ketchem-Grace, superintendent, Ramona Unified School District

"Heather is resolute in her efficacy as a teacher. She believes to her foundation that every student is a capable learner who can and will achieve at high levels. She carefully designs creative student learning opportunities that engage and challenge students and inspires them to work hard, while also providing needed supports to ensure success. Her classroom is a safe haven for learning; she makes personal connections with every student. She understands the importance of establishing a collaborative family culture in her room that is the foundation of student success. Students never forgot their experience in Mrs. McClain's class."

Laura Reyes, first grade, Central Elementary School, Escondido Union School District

Laura Reyes, who teaches first grade at Central Elementary School in the Escondido Union School District, calls herself a "passionate primary teacher" who builds relationships with students and supports all aspects of their growth. She's created a no-fear, whole-brain-teaching classroom that is fun, interactive, and engaging. In her class

students are encouraged to take risks and never give up. During distance learning, Laura transformed ordinary walks with her dog into teachable science moments to engage her students, creating and presenting videos on topics like the life cycle of birds and snakes, snail races, and rainbows. Through a grant, she obtained an aquaponics system for the school, and her students won a statewide video contest on how to grow vegetables using aquaponics. “Herein lie the lessons of first grade,” Reyes said. “Not necessarily in the curriculum adoption, but in the relationships built, the motivation to ask questions and discover, and the love of learning fostered in every child.”

From Crystal Underhill, Central Elementary School principal

“Laura does not work for awards or accolades but serves to inspire and impact all those she comes in contact with each day. She has mastered the elusive art of being firm but fair, having rules yet maintaining positive relationships, all while giving each child acceptance and grace. She teaches her students to strive for excellence, to find joy in learning, and to always do their best. She encourages her colleagues to always give their best to our students, always find the positive, and that the storms of life can often produce beautiful rainbows and new growth.”

Xye Sanders, grades 7 and 8, César Chávez Middle School, Oceanside Unified School District

Xye Sanders teaches math core, math and language arts intervention, learning center, and advisory to seventh and eighth grade students at César Chávez Middle School in the Oceanside Unified School District. As an education specialist, Xye aims to make learning meaningful for every student by showing them that learning is a part of life and can help lead them to great things. She builds relationships with students to discover what makes them tick and how they learn best. “I express my expectations and positive belief that a student doesn’t have to be good at or know everything, but they just need to find success in something to start believing that they are capable of anything.” In addition to teaching, Xye is a member of a team at Chávez that brings new digital technology ideas into schools, put policies in place for student athletes to understand the balance of sports and academics, and started the Girls that Code club.

From Jenny Morgan, César Chávez Middle School principal

“Ms. Sander’s ability to develop trusting relationships with students is built upon her knowledge of each individual student’s needs and backgrounds. She is accessible and approachable to all, her enthusiasm and energy are contagious, and I challenge anyone within proximity to Ms. Sanders to leave her presence without experiencing a reset in mindset and outlook! She exudes excitement in all she does.”

###

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.