



PRESS RELEASE

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2022-23 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 Del Mar, National City, Poway, San Ysidro, and Chula Vista have been named San Diego County Teachers of the Year. The honorees were announced at a reception Friday night as part of the 32nd annual “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers,” brought to you by San Diego County Credit Union in partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE).

The 2022-23 San Diego County Teachers of the Year are:

- **Stephanie Cluxton**, Torrey Hills School, Del Mar Union School District
- **Jacqueline Ma**, Lincoln Acres Elementary, National School District
- **Aimee McCoy**, Mesa Verde Middle School, Poway Unified School District
- **Juanita Nuñez**, Ocean View Hills, Sunset, Smythe, Willow, and La Mirada elementary schools, San Ysidro School District
- **Melissa Rains**, Castle Park Middle School, Sweetwater Union High School District

“Teaching has always been a challenging yet rewarding profession. These last few years have really tested us and through it all, teachers across the county have continued to persevere and make sure that our students are cared for and have all the supports they need to succeed,” said Dr. Paul Gothold, San Diego County superintendent of schools. “The teachers we are celebrating here tonight are innovative in what they do and passionate about the students they serve. It’s an honor to be recognizing 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 next month.

In partnership with SDCOE, 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, hosted by Food Network personality and *San Diego Magazine* owner Troy Johnson, will air at 9 p.m. Oct. 2 on YurView Network (Cox Channel 4) and will replay several times in October and November.

“Cox is proud to partner with the San Diego County Office of Education for our 32nd year to recognize our local public school teachers. Their commitment to their students, especially through the pandemic, has been awe-inspiring,” said Ingo Hentschel, senior vice president and region manager for Cox Communications. “Cox Presents:



Salute to Teachers” is our way of saying ‘thank you’ to our teachers, and we’re thrilled to put the spotlight on their passion for teaching and dedication to their students.”

“SDCCU is proud to support this outstanding awards event celebrating the extraordinary work of teachers and educators who impact our community and students,” said SDCCU President & CEO Teresa Campbell. “As the presenting sponsor of Salute to Teachers, we recognize all teachers for their hard work and commitment to education and shaping the future of today’s youth.”

The 2022-23 County Teachers of the Year were chosen from among 40 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, district and county office of education administrators, and a PTA representative. They were chosen based on school-community involvement, teaching philosophy, knowledge of current educational issues and trends, promotion and development of the teaching profession, school culture, and ability to serve as ambassadors of education.

Since 1974, 191 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, Feeding San Diego, Procopio, iHeart Radio, KPBS, Meritage, The Mightier 1090, and *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.

Brief bios of the five San Diego County Teachers of the Year are included below along with a testimonial, and photos may be found [in this Google folder](#). You may view here [a full list of the 40 nominees](#) from whom the five County Teachers of the Year were selected.

2022-23 San Diego County Teachers of the Year Biographies and Testimonials

Stephanie Cluxton, Kindergarten, Torrey Hills School, Del Mar Union School District

Torrey Hills School (Del Mar Union School District) kindergarten teacher **Stephanie Cluxton** strives to create a classroom environment where students take ownership of their learning, deepen their curiosity, and discover their gifts. She believes in teaching and engaging the whole child, counting academics and social-emotional learning as equally important. Her connections with students and families go beyond the classroom to provide the best possible experiences for the young learners in her classroom.

“When you meet Stephanie, you instantly feel warm and fuzzy inside. Her enthusiasm, love, and passion for teaching and for her students radiates. My oldest daughter had her in 2020 when things abruptly shifted from in-person normalcy to remote learning. In a time of great uncertainty, Stephanie’s calm voice echoing over Zoom calls comforted both students and parents alike. She gracefully handled remote learning, connecting with kindergarteners and their families during unimaginable circumstances. It was then that it truly felt like she was part of our family. Her kindness, cheerfulness, and unmatched patience are qualities I greatly admire.”

Lauren, parent, Torrey Hills School

Jacqueline Ma, Grade 6, Lincoln Acres Elementary, National School District

Jacqueline Ma is a 6th grade teacher at Lincoln Acres Elementary in National City, part of the National School District. She considers the relationships she maintains with her students her greatest accomplishments. She has spearheaded a schoolwide STEM improvement plan, bringing in outside organizations – including the Salk Institute,

Scripps Institute of Oceanography, the Fleet Science Center, and the San Diego Zoo – and providing opportunities for students to interact with professionals doing the work to better visualize a path to a rewarding STEM career.

“I can’t imagine a more qualified and passionate educator to receive this honor. The creativity, initiative, collaboration, and 100% dedication Ms. Ma has for her students and the school is immeasurable. When students leave Ms. Ma’s room, they are more confident students, more engaged citizens, and more thoughtful adolescents who know they are loved.”

Kathy Melanese, principal, Lincoln Acres Elementary

Aimee McCoy, Grade 8 Humanities and AVID, Mesa Verde Middle School, Poway Unified School District

Aimee McCoy is an 8th grade language arts teacher and AVID coordinator at Mesa Verde Middle School, located in Poway Unified School District. She believes that allowing students to “feel valued by sharing and asking questions” is essential to the success of the whole class. She enjoys bringing the community to campus so students can learn about the range of career and educational paths they can pursue. Her encouragement and instruction inspire her students and fellow educators.

“In our AVID class, we had a really diverse group of students from all different backgrounds and abilities, but Ms. McCoy seemed to make time for each and every one of us and seemed to connect and respect each individual student. This special connection Ms. McCoy makes with her students meant she was really there for you when you were having a hard time. She’s not just focused on the academics, but also on students and their well-being. Ms. McCoy is an amazing example of what a teacher should be: knowledgeable, fun, able to connect, and an excellent mentor. I will forever be grateful for and look up to her.”

Callie, former student

Juanita Nuñez, Ocean View Hills, Sunset, Smythe, Willow, and La Mirada elementary schools, Grades 4-6 STEM/Physical Education, San Ysidro School District

Juanita Nuñez is a STEM and physical education teacher across five different schools within the San Ysidro School District. She engages 370 students each week in 80-minute “Sci-Phy” classes, where a combination of science and physical education instruction is covered. Juanita grew up a child of migratory farm workers, and her early experiences have shaped her into a compassionate and inspiring educator. Those who know her say Juanita pours her heart, soul, and mind into making learning fun and meaningful for her students.

“Juanita is the type of rare and beautiful human being that can mesh both sides of the brain to instruct students in advanced material while thoroughly enjoying themselves. She’s intelligent and capable of teaching robotics, but funny and charismatic at the same time. Her students love her and bond with her. She teaches them life lessons right along with science and technology lessons. Her students come back years later and pinpoint what they learned from her. Some of these important lessons are life lessons that have saved lives. She has the capacity to build trust and connections with students. These students open up to her and she dedicates endless hours to supporting them and making sure they are in a good state of mind. Once they are ready to learn, she takes them to advanced levels of rigor in science and technology. Ms. Nuñez’s students are fortunate to have such a talented, intelligent, and nurturing teacher.”

Elva De Baca, resource teacher, San Ysidro School District

Melissa Rains, Grade 8 Science, Castle Park Middle School, Sweetwater Union High School District

Students in **Melissa Rains’** Castle Park Middle School (Sweetwater Union High School District) science class are greeted with a daily “Question of the Day” designed to gauge how they are feeling coming into class. The answers guide the first topic of conversation when class begins, and the group segues into a “mindful moment” before the

science lesson of the day. Melissa believes that her connection with her students is the foundation from which they can explore and appreciate science.

“One step into Melissa’s classroom and you can feel the trust among the students and the mutual respect that they share with their teacher. Melissa has mastered the art of being a ‘warm demander,’ the delicate balance of setting high expectations and the support in place for all students to achieve their highest potential. She has cultivated a culture and climate in her classroom that is exemplary of what all of us in education would like to see happening across the nation.”

Luis Lopez, equity and culture curriculum TOSA, Sweetwater Union High School District

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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.