



EXCELLENCE
IN EDUCATION

MERCED COUNTY

2021

STEVE M. TIETJEN, ED.D.

MERCED COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS



Welcome to the Excellence in Education awards program — an evening to celebrate teachers, school employees and school administrators. Those honored tonight represent quality school employees throughout Merced County. Their vision and passion for education are shared daily with students, parents, educators and the community. The Merced County Office of Education gratefully acknowledges Educational Employees

Credit Union's sponsorship of this event and its commitment to education.

ELIZABETH J. DOOLEY

PRESIDENT/CEO EDUCATIONAL EMPLOYEES CREDIT UNION



EECU is proud to work in partnership with the Merced County Office of Education on the prestigious Excellence in Education awards program. We have proudly co-sponsored the event since 2006 and we look forward to the ceremony each year.

The school employees, teachers, and administrators being honored tonight are very deserving of this special recognition. They are

committed to providing students with a quality education and the best school experience possible – whether in person or through online learning. Their commitment to their students, their schools, and their communities is remarkable. Congratulations to all of tonight's honorees.



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Steve M. Tietjen, Ed.D.
County Superintendent of Schools



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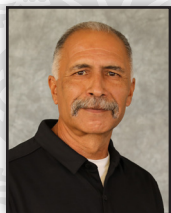


EMPLOYEE HONOREES



GABRIELA BRAVO
ATWATER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE ASSISTANT - SHAFFER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Gabriela is an Office Assistant at Shaffer Elementary School. As an employee and parent of two AESD students, Gabriela understands families and has the exceptional ability to build relationships with her positive attitude and warm, welcoming smile. Gabriela has demonstrated incredible dedication as she was on the frontline assisting families who struggled with the technology of distant learning. Her ability to take on any challenge with a positive attitude is admirable, and her kindness towards families and the community is felt by everyone who walks into the front office.



MARCIAL YBARRA JR.
MERCED CITY SCHOOL
ADA GIVENS ELEMENTARY - HEAD CUSTODIAN

Marcial is the Head Custodian at Ada Givens Elementary School. Marcial is guided by the belief that a safe and well-maintained environment is what students need in order to learn and that the most important impact he can make is to nurture a student's character. Whether it be by providing mentorship to those who may be struggling or by taking on student helpers and instilling a sense of accomplishment and work ethic into them, Marcial proves that he is not only an exceptional Head Custodian, but also a valued partner in the education of all students.



MAI YER VANG
EL NIDO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT
INSTRUCTIONAL AIDE - EL NIDO SCHOOL

Mai Yer Vang is an Instructional Aid at El Nido Elementary School. Mai Yer's kind and positive attitude established her as a favorite amongst students and her willingness to help made her essential amongst staff and teachers. She believes that the biggest impact she can make is being present for students and making sure they see that they are important. Her good nature provides students with a sense of security and her love for her job is reflected in everything she does.



ADELAIDE ETHERIDGE
GUSTINE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
MAINTENANCE - GUSTINE UNIFIED HIGH SCHOOL

Adelaide works in Maintenance at Gustine Unified High School. Adelaide has displayed a level of attention to detail and work ethic that is second to none. As soon as students step foot onto campus the school becomes a learning environment and Adelaide goes the extra mile every day to create a safe and positive place for students to learn and succeed. She takes pride in her work and cares for everyone who is part of her school community.

EMPLOYEE HONOREES



DOTTY HERNANDEZ

**DOS-PALOS-ORO LOMA JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
EXECUTIVE ASST. TO SUPERINTENDENT - DISTRICT OFFICE**

Dotty is an Executive Assistant to the Superintendent for Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District. The day-to-day decisions made by the Superintendent's office have a direct impact on students' education and Dotty coordinates these decisions with the students as her main priority. The level of trust and confidence the community has in her is a direct result of her commitment to her school district and her understanding of what the education system means to families.



GIGI BETTIS

**MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
HUMAN RESOURCE ASSISTANT - MCOE COMPLEX
CSEA CHAPTER PRESIDENT AND JOB STEWARD**

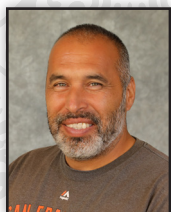
Along with her responsibilities as a Human Resource Assistant for Merced County Office of Education, Gigi is also the Chapter President and Job Steward for the California School Employee Association. She is exceptional at assisting employees that need guidance as well as empowering them to use their own voice, and doing it all with warmth, enthusiasm, and a sincere desire to promote positive labor relations. Gigi's work is the embodiment of the MCOE mission: Nurture, Serve, and Lead. And her dedication is an inspiration to everyone.



ROSEMARY COTA

**MERCED UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
GOLDEN VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA SUPERVISOR**

Rosemary is the Cafeteria Supervisor at Golden Valley High School. Rosemary is described as a hard worker who inspires confidence in everyone around her. The leadership she displayed amid the pandemic, encouraging her team despite the troubling times, was a reflection of her professionalism as a Supervisor. Rosemary's leadership shows how much she cares for the program and the students she serves by providing meals, making connections, and serving students and the community, with positive energy and a can-do attitude.



ANTONIO VASQUEZ

**WEAVER UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
WEAVER MIDDLE SCHOOL - CUSTODIAN**

Antonio works as a Custodian at Weaver Middle School. Antonio's main priority is safety. He believes that when students aren't feeling safe, they aren't giving it their all. He is determined to create an environment where students and staff feel comfortable and ready to learn. He keeps health, safety, and care of the community at the heart of his work and is a staff member who has truly had a positive impact on the overall climate and culture of the school.

TEACHER HONOREES



AMY PIKAS

**LOS BANOS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT - MERCY SPRINGS ELEMENTARY
INCLUSION SPECIALIST - SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Amy is an Inclusion Specialist at Mercy Springs Elementary. In her ten years of experience Amy has worked with the most at-risk students. Her dedication to them and her work are without fail.

Amy is described as someone with exceptional grit, her desire to be the first one to volunteer and her ability to take up extra projects whenever necessary displays the level of dedication she has both on campus and in the community. Her presence radiates positivity and optimism wherever she goes.



ERIN MILLS

**MCSWAIN UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
RESOURCE SPECIALIST**

As a Resource Specialist, creativity is essential to adapt and cater to each child's learning style. Erin not only displays dedication and consideration while working on student's individualized

Education Programs, but creativity is also one of her strongest characteristics. Her ability to motivate students to not be held back by fear allows them to cultivate relationships and foster an education in emotional growth. Erin finds rewards in everything her students do, whether it be making a new friend or trying a new activity, she celebrates every success.



ELIZABETH AVIZ-AVILA

**MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
HARMONY ELEMENTARY – SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER**

Elizabeth is a Special Education Teacher in the MCOE Special Education Department. Elizabeth has demonstrated her ability to provide intensive support for behaviorally challenged students and implemented a curriculum to keep students engaged and productive. More importantly, Elizabeth shows her students that she genuinely loves and cares for them, believing that once a student feels cared for they can open up to the learning process. For Elizabeth, loving first and teaching second can be the most powerful message she can send to her students.



MIKE ARNOLD

**ATWATER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT - MITCHELL SENIOR
7TH GRADE TEACHER - MATH**

Mike teaches seventh grade math for Atwater Elementary School District at Mitchell Senior. Mike believes that to teach a student means to connect, understand, inspire, and change them. His teaching is rooted in building relationships with students. Whether it

be after school activities like Minecraft Club or reviewing for a math test in a virtual escape room, Mike has the ability to create amusing and original activities for students of all levels of reluctance and encourages them to explore and create.

TEACHER HONOREES



TANYA ABRAMS
DELHI UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
DELHI HIGH SCHOOL – SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

Tanya is a Special Education Teacher at Delhi High School. What truly sets Tanya apart is the amount of time she makes available to her students. Whether it be after school, on the weekend, or even tutoring students during summer break. She makes herself available whenever students or parents need her. Tanya understands the importance of communicating and creating relationships and her enthusiasm, love, and passion for supporting and teaching is the definition of "going above and beyond."



DEBBIE MARTIN
DOS PALOS ELEMENTARY
READING SPECIALIST/ACADEMIC COACH

Debbie is a Reading Specialist at Dos Palos Elementary School. Debbie believes that students don't care about how much you know, but rather how much you care. As a teacher Debbie understands that it is her professional responsibility to be fully engaged with students and to foster relationships with them, their parents, and the community. She plays a crucial role in ensuring struggling families have a voice in their children's educational struggles and successes.



MICHELE BURKHART
GUSTINE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
DISTANCE LEARNING TEACHER

Michele is a Distance Learning Teacher for Gustine Elementary School. For Michele, teaching is the highest responsibility anyone can have. As a teacher, she believes that she not only holds the responsibility of teaching students multiple subjects, but also to teach them life skills and behaviors they need to become successful adults. Michele approaches teaching with a humbleness and passion for making sure all students reach their highest level of academic success. For her, that is the real reward.



ERICKA BAUTISTA
LOS BANOS UNIFIED
MIANO ELEMENTARY – EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Ericka Bautista is a Preschool Teacher at Miano Elementary. Ericka is optimistic, energetic and constantly pursuing opportunities for professional growth. In addition to teaching her preschool students, Ericka also participated in the Merced College Mentor program where she provided mentorship to ECE college students and acted as coordinator for the Children's Leadership Training Institute. With anything she is doing, Ericka carries herself with a positive demeanor and encourages her students to do the same.

TEACHER HONOREES



CRYSTAL SOUSA
MERCED UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
LIVINGSTON HIGH SCHOOL

Crystal is a Special Education Teacher at Livingston High School. Crystal has demonstrated a dedication for teaching and helping students that truly makes her stand out from the crowd. During the pandemic, she had made numerous home visits to maintain connections with students and ensure they continue to be engaged in their studies. Teaching allows Crystal to help her students find their voice and advocate for themselves. Her patience, kindness, and compassion in the face of difficult days are what make her a model for other educators.



MELISSA SANDERS
WEAVER UNION
WEAVER MIDDLE SCHOOL – TEACHER - MATH/SCIENCE

Melissa teaches at Weaver Middle School. Melissa has served generations of families, and embodies the values that make Weaver a great place for students to grow and succeed. In addition to her many accomplishments as a teacher, one that stands out the most is her involvement with Weaver Performing Arts. One of many opportunities she is involved in that fosters positive student social emotional growth and promotes a high level of student learning and academic success.



LINDA GARIBAY
EL NIDO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT
EL NIDO SCHOOL – TEACHER - 2ND GRADE

Linda is a second grade teacher at El Nido Elementary School. Linda proves that even after sixteen years she is a dynamic member of the El Nido family. She remains current with the latest instructional strategies and technologies, and can reach any troubled student with profound empathy. In addition to that she has the ability to challenge her brightest students because of her own pursued professional development. Above all she teaches students to strive for excellence, to love reading, and to respect each other.



ADMINISTRATORS HONOREES



CRISTI JOHNSON

**MERCED UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT - DISTRICT OFFICE
DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES**

Cristi is the Director of Student Services at the district office for Merced Union High School. Cristi demonstrates an unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

She has also shown dedication to keeping staff safe by working with local medical professionals to ensure that every staff member had the opportunity to get vaccinated. Her ability to mobilize resources for students and staff and her tireless efforts to create improved opportunities have made an incredible impact on the district and the community.



FRANCISCO ROMO

**MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
DIRECTOR OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Francisco is the Director of Continuous Improvement for the Merced County Office of Education. Francisco has dedicated his career to giving a voice to people who have not always had one and bringing a positive approach to challenging situations. He is

described as a thoughtful person devoted to improving instruction and academic outcomes for English learners and his level of enthusiasm is only matched by his selfless desire to see people succeed and grow.



STEVE WHITAKER

**MERCED CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR**

Steve is the Maintenance Supervisor for Merced City School District. Steve works hard to ensure that everything is done seamlessly, timely, and to a high level of satisfaction. He prioritizes the safety of students and staff, and is committed to improving

safety of sanitation products on hand. His dedication to working hard, working smart, and transferring that mentality to others makes him a strong supervisor and an even stronger leader.



JOSEPH TENORIO

**DELHI UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
DIRECTOR OF FOOD SERVICES**

Joseph is the Director of Food Services at Delhi Unified School District. Joseph regularly looks for innovative menu ideas and even implemented culturally diverse meals to reflect student diversity.

Joseph is not only quick to serve student nutritional needs, but he also creates events that help reward school staff throughout the year. He is described as an outstanding leader and an even more outstanding person, his enthusiasm displays his level of passion for food service and nutrition.

ADMINISTRATORS HONOREES



CHERYL BROWN
ATWATER ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL NURSE

Cheryl is a School Nurse at Atwater Elementary School District. As a school nurse for 35 years and sworn disaster worker, Cheryl volunteered her services with the COVID team at MCDPH for two months. Because of that experience, Cheryl was given the knowledge and resources to step up and guide the Atwater community in the months that followed as her role of COVID Coordinator. Her attention to detail, reliability, and organization is what hallmarks her performance. A rare few have demonstrated the level of dedication, compassion, and empathy that is reflected in her performance everyday.



LORI GONZALEZ
EL NIDO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT
EL NIDO SCHOOL – SUPERINTENDENT

Lori is the Superintendent for El Nido Elementary School. Her willingness to collaborate, eagerness to learn, and impressive ability to multitask demonstrates her honorable nature and love for education. Under her leadership she has established resources such as farmers market food donation/partnerships for low income families, internet hot spots throughout the community, and PBS family educational workshops. She is honest, compassionate, and genuinely interested in what is best for the school and the community. She has brought staff, the district, and the community closer together.



ALEJANDRO FRANCO/STACY ORTEGA
LOS BANOS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
CREEKSIDE JUNIOR HIGH – COUNSELORS

Alejandro and Stacy are School Counselors at Creekside Junior High School. Alejandro and Stacy's goals are to build strong rapport with students and assure them that they're on the right path. They seek to encourage students to develop and strengthen students ability to excel both in school and at home so they can be prepared for the future. During the pandemic, they created two websites that focused on personal and academic support for students, and hosted daily virtual "Lunch Bunch" to provide students the opportunity to connect and interact with each other. Both Alejandro and Stacy are driven by a genuine regard for the well-being of others, they make every effort to cultivate strong relationships with students and their families.



TEACHER *of the* YEAR



PAMELA ATKINSON

**Merced City School District -
Hoover Middle School
Teacher - Language Arts/History**

Pamela is a Language Arts and History Teacher at Hoover Middle School. Pamela doesn't just teach to her students, she gives them the ability to teach themselves, which is a skill they take with them even after they move on from her class. Despite her many years in the teaching profession Pamela is a lifelong learner and uses this trait to regularly improve on her craft. She carefully and continuously checks in with students and adjusts her lessons accordingly.

Pamela's dedication to her students goes well beyond the classroom. In addition to attending multiple sporting events, she runs after school tutorials, and encourages her students to participate in writing, poetry, and speech festivals. Her carefully developed projects and assignments instills dedication, commitment, and love of learning into her students and they leave her class with not only the desire to do great things, but also the understanding that it takes time and effort to do so.





EMPLOYEE *of the* YEAR



ADAN MORENO
Delhi Unified School District
Harmony Elementary School
Lead Maintenance

continued to go to campus to ensure that it was ready when students returned. He painted murals and distance dots all over school, and replaced water fountains with touchless water bottle fillers. Despite the pressures of his job, Adan interacts with everyone in a pleasant and positive attitude. Over his many years in the district, Adan's love for his job and work ethic continues to be unwavered.

Adan is the lead maintenance at Harmony Elementary school. His commitment to the students and staff of his district doesn't stop at the minimal requirements. Adan constantly thinks of ways to inspire students to show pride and appreciation for their school. Even going so far as to spend hours of his own time and artistic ability to paint and build signs for the school. In addition to using his own special talents, Adan used his own creative eye to add color and coordination to give the campus a special look.

During the pandemic when staff was sent home, Adan





ADMINISTRATOR *of the* YEAR



PAOZE LEE
Dos Palos Oro Loma JUSD
Technology Systems Director

Paoze is the Technology Systems Director for Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified school district. Paoze believes that with technology access students can take charge in their own growth and development, resulting in students becoming confident, respectful, and productive individuals. Not only has he and his team been successful in implementing chromebooks and laptops for students, but also with the guidance of district leadership 4G LTE cell towers were approved by the district, so that students and their families can access high speed internet from home.

Paoze has also worked with partnerships such as the Parent Institute for Quality Education, which empowered parents to engage in the school district and complete technology training, as well as the ROP technology program which resulted in many students pursuing careers in technology. Like technology itself, Paoze thrives and adapts, and is constantly learning and improving so that he and his team can provide every student, teacher, and member of the community with the best first class education possible.



ABOUT *our* ARTIST



Clement J. Renzi loved his family, Central California and the art of sculpting. A Visalia native and graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, he studied in Vienna at the Academy of Applied Arts, under Franz Knezl. From Vienna, the casting of bronze sculptures took Renzi to Italy, Spain and Mexico. He was especially fortunate to use the foundry of Lester Harry, a Central Valley bronze caster. Clement passed away on December 1, 2009 at the age of 84. Renzi's final work is a life-sized, three-figure sculpture titled "Commencement" that was installed in 2011 and adorns the entryway to the Merced County Office of Education.





SPECIAL THANKS

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AWARD ARTIST

Clement J. Renzi

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