



EXCELLENCE
IN EDUCATION

MERCED COUNTY

2023

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



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 exemplary 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



The Excellence in Education awards ceremony is an opportunity for us to come together to recognize and celebrate the many outstanding teachers, school employees and administrators in Merced County. This annual event honors their achievements and their commitment to making a difference in the lives of schoolchildren throughout the region. EECU has proudly co-sponsored the awards ceremony since 2006 and it is our pleasure and privilege to be part of this very special event. Congratulations to all of the nominees, finalists and winners on this well-deserved recognition of the positive impact they have on their students and their communities.

Schedule of Events

Steve Tietjen, Ed.D.
*Merced County
Superintendent of Schools*

Opening Comments

Cub Scout Pack 96

Presentation of Colors

Arianna Muniz
Schelby School

National Anthem

Beth Dooley
President/CEO EECU

Remarks from EECU

Steve Tietjen, Ed.D.
*Merced County
Superintendent of Schools*

**Introduction of
Master of Ceremonies**

Paul Loeffler
Master of Ceremonies

2023 Recognitions

- Selection Committee
- EIE Committee
- Employee Honorees
- Administrator
Honorees
- Teacher Honorees

Employee Honorees



Ronald Griggs

**Head Custodian – Elmer Wood Elementary School
Atwater Elementary School District**

Ronald is the Head Custodian at Elmer Wood Elementary School. Ronald and his team strive to maintain a clean and organized school environment, where students feel safe and ready to learn. He firmly believes his work on campus contributes to student success just as much as teaching, and that education is not only about academics, but providing living examples of how students can become good, productive people.



Veronica Gutierrez

**Principal Secretary – Schendel Elementary School
Delhi Unified School District**

With 27 years at Schendel Elementary and counting, Veronica has devoted countless hours to her school community. Although the school has gone through many changes, Veronica remained a constant beacon of kindness and security. Her commitment to the school earned her the title of Merced County Classified Employee of the Year in 2011 and even now her determination continues to create a warm, welcoming school environment.



Francisca Bravo

**Site Secretary – George Christian Educational Center
Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District**

As Site Secretary at George Christian Educational Center, Francisca has a multitude of responsibilities with each school under the alternative education program, which include facilitating communication between teachers and parents. Of all her tasks, she feels the most important part of her job is to foster a supportive relationship with students and ensures that everyone who comes into the office feels heard and respected.

Employee Honorees



Cecilia Perez

**Administrative Assistant – Educational Services Department
Merced County Office of Education**

In Cecilia's 13 years as an Administrative Assistant at MCOE, she never lost focus of the goal to make a positive impact for students and families. She helped with the development of new services by providing administrative support and never hesitates to offer assistance to other programs when needed. She is resourceful, adept at problem solving and has an incredible ability to maintain a sense of joy and humor in the face of challenges.



Alexis Barba

**After School Lead – McSwain Elementary School
McSwain Union Elementary School**

Alexis is an After School Lead at McSwain Elementary School. In this role with the after school program, Alexis is responsible for oversight, which includes developing a positive rapport with staff and structuring classroom behavior expectations. In a short amount of time, Alexis has transformed the program into one that not only continues students' daily education, but also provides a safe environment for students to thrive.



Claudia Montes

**Department Secretary - Pupil Services
Merced City School District**

As the Department Secretary of Pupil Services for the Merced City School District, Claudia views her role as an opportunity to give back to her community and advocate for families in need, similar to her own experience. As a result, she makes sure that everyone who comes to her desk leaves with the resources and support they need for success and never turns away the opportunity to help, regardless of her workload.



Ginger Pryor

**Cafeteria Supervisor – East Campus Education Center
Merced Union High School District**

Ginger's work ethic and leadership skills are reflected through how well she and her team work together daily to support students and staff. She and her staff not only tend to East Campus, but also serve more than 400 breakfasts and lunches daily for additional schools countywide. She also facilitated the delivery of hundreds of meals for community members displaced by winter floods. Ginger demonstrates compassion, dedication and a genuine heart for students.

Administrator Honorees



Aaron Delworth

**Assistant Superintendent - Business Services
Atwater Elementary School District**

Aaron Delworth has served in the classroom as a teacher, on the field as a coach and in the office as an administrator. Despite shifting closer to the administrative side as the Atwater Elementary School District Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, Aaron never lost his educational lens and constantly asks how he can improve the learning landscape. His hands-on approach to management and his ability to prioritize relationships between programs advances the entire district.



Rosa Gonzalez

**Principal - Harmony Elementary School
Delhi Unified School District**

One of Rosa Gonzalez's greatest strengths as Harmony Elementary School Principal is her commitment to growing as a professional and a leader. She places high expectations on herself, her colleagues and her students. Her dedication to improving instructional strategies, positive attitude and genuine interest in students' educational journey motivates everyone around her to work hard to ensure every student is successful.



Marie Hicks

**Director of Childhood Development
Merced City School District**

As Director of Childhood Development Programs, Marie led the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten, prepared staff to serve young students and championed the community of practice between Preschool, TK and Kindergarten teachers. She is described as kind, thorough and a fierce advocate for all children. She makes students and colleagues alike feel safe, supported and equipped to succeed.



Tamara Simmons

**Lead School Nurse - Golden Valley High School
Merced Union High School District**

Tamara's main goal as the lead nurse for Golden Valley High School is to support students so they can concentrate on school and acquire the skills and education they need for success. She stands out as someone who is willing to do whatever it takes to establish an environment that meets every student's needs quickly and equitably. She consistently demonstrates an unwavering commitment to caring for and improving outcomes for students.

Teacher Honorees



Flor Vicki Castillo

**Third Grade Teacher – Peggy Heller Elementary School
Atwater Elementary School District**

Vicki recently left Peggy Heller Elementary School to teach at Juniper Elementary School. Wherever her school site, Vicki continues to hold her students to high expectations, both academically and morally, and works hard to provide them with the support and resources they need to meet those expectations. According to Vicki, every student has the potential to learn and become successful, despite personal challenges or learning barriers.



Sharon Alsobrook

**Special Education Teacher – El Capitan Elementary School
Delhi Unified School District**

Sharon is a Special Education Teacher at El Capitan Elementary School. Sharon's view of teaching is grounded in the belief that every student has unique strengths and abilities. Because of this, she focuses her lessons in a way that helps each individual student build confidence in those strengths and take ownership of their education. Sharon is dedicated to students, supportive of staff and willing to lend as much time needed to help students succeed.



Yvette Jasso

**Science/Math Teacher – Bernhard Marks Elementary School
Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District**

Yvette is best known for her proactive teaching, passion for education and is often described as an agent for change at her school. She regularly demonstrates a growth mindset within her classroom and encourages her students to do the same. Yvette also initiated many improvements around campus including the transition to departmentalized instruction for the fifth grade, which has led to an increase in student achievement.

Teacher Honorees



Melissa Harrelson

**Preschool Teacher - Dos Palos State Preschool
Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District**

Melissa's ability to connect with students, colleagues and parents in the community are what make her an effective educator. For Melissa, the biggest reward from teaching is when a child feels they can come into a classroom environment and feel comfortable enough to express themselves. She believes that independence, self-awareness and a positive rapport with their teacher are what pave the way for student success.



Melanie Mello

**Second Grade Teacher - Gustine Elementary School
Gustine Elementary Unified School District**

Melanie is known for her outgoing, vibrant personality that both students and staff cherish. Not only does she embrace her role as a lead teacher and mentor by supporting her colleagues, but she also looks for new ways to help her students, or "marsh-mellos", remember important concepts. Her ability to make learning fun and engaging for students encourage them to work hard and overcome personal challenges.



Elisa Flores

**Music Teacher - Livingston Middle School
Livingston Union School District**

Elisa is an expert at building relationships with her students, setting expectations and establishing performance goals. She firmly believes in the idea of continued growth and allows students to redo assignments without penalty until they get it right. Her dedication to expanding opportunities for students to showcase their talents and her commitment to helping them succeed allows them to shine at every band review.

Teacher Honorees



Rosario Lara Rojas

**Special Education Teacher - Floyd A. Schelby School
Merced County Office of Education**

Rosario's professionalism, enthusiasm and passion for her job is unrivaled. She considers herself as more than a teacher, instead she becomes whatever and whoever necessary to help her students succeed and does everything in her power to make sure parents feel involved in their child's education plan. Her ability to communicate and talent for making students feel like they belong allow her to light up every classroom.



Kristin Rocha

**Transitional Kindergarten Teacher - McSwain Elementary School
McSwain Unified School District**

In her role as Transitional Kindergarten Teacher, Kristin has developed a positive rapport with students, built relationships with families and stepped up as a leader on the school's campus. Her attitude is fun, positive and supportive while still upholding the district's schoolwide expectations. Her drive, willingness to learn and experience has already solidified her as a valuable member of the McSwain Elementary team.



Christy Quiralte

**Preschool Teacher - Margaret Sheehy Elementary School
Merced City School District**

Christy is the lead preschool teacher for Sheehy Elementary School. In the 14 years Christy has held her position as Sheehy Elementary, she has demonstrated outstanding dedication and desire to support students and their families. She gets to know their likes, dislikes, strengths and what their areas of growth are. It is no surprise that families return year after year requesting Christy as their child's teacher.



Lucrecia Sicairos

**Sixth Grade Teacher - Alicia Reyes Elementary School
Merced City School District**

What makes Lucrecia's teaching style so special is how she finds ways to connect with students on a personal level and uses that connection to inspire them to take educational risks. After 13 years of teaching, Lucrecia feels that the most rewarding part of her work is when a former student shares how their time in her classroom inspired them to become the person they are today.



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EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



YOLANDA TUALLA

Cafeteria Lead

Gustine High School

Gustine Unified School District

Yolanda is the Cafeteria Lead at Gustine High School. One of the most valuable qualities Yolanda possesses is her ability to establish relationships built on trust and respect with students so they never have to feel embarrassed about saying they're hungry. On more

than one occasion, Yolanda has taken time out of her day to tend to students' needs, because of this they can come to her for anything and feel comfortable expressing their needs. Her ability to establish lifelong relationships does not stop with students, Yolanda goes above and beyond to create memorable experiences for staff on campus, whether it is for a birthday or a holiday, she approaches everything with thoughtfulness. She also sets high expectations for her food service team and supports them in meeting those expectations when creating fun events for the school, which include opening day for Major League Baseball, the Honor Roll Luncheon and Senior Breakfast, among others. Whereas teachers say no child should get left behind, Yolanda says no child should go hungry, and with her leadership, they never do.



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ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR



MARIA DURAN-BARAJAS

Director

**Special Education Department
Merced County Office of Education**

Maria is a Special Education Director for the Merced County Office of Education. Maria has served the students of Merced County in a variety of ways over the course of her 29 years in education. In her role as a director,

Maria is responsible for various functions of the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) countywide programs which includes specialized programs and services for students with visual and hearing impairments. Maria has an incredible knack for supervising staff, programs and developing new procedures all while keeping students as the focus. Through her leadership and extensive knowledge of the complexities associated with Special Education, the programs continue to provide quality support and services that positively impact students and their families across the county. Her strong work ethic and genuine desire to effect positive change makes MCOE, and the community, a more inclusive space for students with special needs.



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TEACHER OF THE YEAR



YER LAWSON

Science Teacher

Merced High School

Merced Union High School District

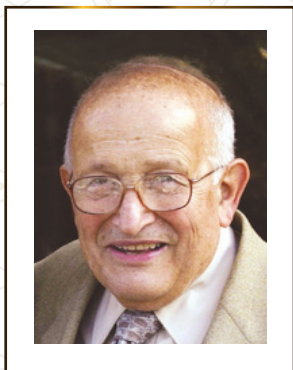
Yer considers herself an extension of every great teacher who inspired her own educational journey. Now in her eleventh year of teaching, she continues to pass on that same encouragement to her students. Not only is she the instructor for biology and AP biology, but she is also the lead

coach for the school's academic decathlon team, which achieved multiple victories under her guidance; an advisor for the KIWINs club, a club that promotes public service in the community; and the department chair, where she supports the other teachers in her department. Yer takes on these responsibilities, not to just inspire her colleagues and foster greatness in her students, but to nurture great people who have the capacity to make a positive difference in their communities. Through honest self-reflection and a willingness to learn, Yer adjusts her lessons to find the best and most effective ways to reach her students and instills in them a love of learning, perseverance and teamwork. Yer possesses all of the qualities of what make a great teacher and an exceptional leader.



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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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Steve Roussos | Irene Beattie | Colton Dennis

AWARD ARTIST

Clement J. Renzi

PRESENTATION OF COLORS AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

Cub Scout Pack 96 | Arianna Muniz - Schelby School

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County Superintendent of Schools



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