



EXCELLENCE
IN EDUCATION

MERCED COUNTY

2020

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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EMPLOYEE HONOREES



NELSON VIEIRA-DENNY
ATWATER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Nelson takes great pride in his campus and wants others to know that custodians do more than just clean. Nelson is proactive in his efforts to improve the campus, going above and beyond expectations, demonstrating his excellence in education.



DONNA MCDANIELS
DOS PALOS-ORO LOMA JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Donna is a hardworking member of the district staff and strives to ensure all district sites are ready for students each day. Recently retired, Ms. Donna — as the students call her — loves building a bond with them and staff. Donna gives back to her community through volunteer work and fundraising for scholarships.



CAROLINA "KARO" OJEDA
EL NIDO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

As the Assistant Cook in El Nido, it is Karo's job to ensure students are healthy and happy and that starts with a nutritious meal. She encourages students to make healthy choices so they are better prepared to learn and not worried about being hungry.



ANDREA VERDIN
GUSTINE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Andrea is a Secretary at Gustine High School and has the responsibility of operating the main office and overseeing the day-to-day operations. At Gustine High School, their saying is "Be the Difference" and Andrea wants to make sure she is the difference in the lives of each student that walks through the doors.



LORENA BURROLA
MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION – EARLY EDUCATION

As the Program Supervisor for the Enrollment and Referral Program, Lorena works with child-care providers who are eager to provide high-quality learning and educational settings to young learners. Lorena is passionate and dedicated to her job. She has an exceptional ability to connect with students, families and providers.



DOROTHY CALVINO
WEAVER UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dorothy is a Counselor at Pioneer Elementary who provides a solid foundation in social emotional learning. As a former school nurse, she believes fostering good teacher-parent communication is important to the social-emotional health of the student. It is Dorothy's goal to see improvement in their behavior and classroom achievements.

ADMINISTRATOR HONOREES



LYNDSAY OLDS
ATWATER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Lyndsay is the Principal at Peggy Heller Elementary and is an outstanding school leader with a true heart for education. Lyndsay works with her staff to ensure that their students are prepared and ready for success. In 2019, Peggy Heller was named a California Distinguished School, one of only three schools in Merced County to earn that distinction.



ALMA DE LUNA
LIVINGSTON UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Alma is the Principal of Yamato Colony Elementary. She supports her teachers as learning professionals with a focus on doing what is best for students. As a result, staff is cohesive, engaged and making a positive difference for students. Their work is evident in significant increases in academic achievement scores, attendance and a low discipline rate.



CINDY HEATON
MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION – SPECIAL EDUCATION

Cindy is a Director in the Special Education Department. She immerses herself in providing support and opportunities for students, families, community, staff and colleagues that provide a quality education to students with special needs and abilities. Her love of students and people show through in everything she does.



BARBARA TANZILLO
MERCED UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Barbara is a Program Administrator for Career Technical Education and Dual Enrollment. Her position aligns the district office and school sites to ensure that the site's CTE program and pathway goals for their students are rigorous and relevant. Barbara also oversees the articulation and dual enrollment with Merced College.

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.

TEACHER HONOREES



THOMAS WESTERDOLL
ATWATER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Thomas is an Industrial Arts Teacher at Mitchell Senior and loves the energy and excitement of his students and expanding their knowledge base to explore and identify their natural talent for design and engineering. His class is a student's first glimpse into a CTE pathway, where they are focused on hands-on experiences.



CARIE HALEY
ATWATER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Carie is the Lead Preschool Teacher at Shaffer Elementary and knows that improving student achievement means setting the stage to enhance learning and development in each child individually. She works hard to build relationships with each child to gain knowledge about their personality, learning process and interests.



AMY VALLADAO
BALICO-CRESSEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Amy is a 1st grade teacher at Cressey Elementary and focuses on her students' social emotional needs, not just their academic needs. She believes in building self-confidence by reminding them of their strengths and talents. No matter how big or small the milestone, students are always working towards making growth in grade-level standards.



JENNY HUNGER
DOS PALOS-ORO LOMA JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Jenny is a Career Technical Education-Business Teacher at Dos Palos High School and understands the importance of keeping lessons real and relevant. She has helped shape the DPHS CTE program into one of the best in the Central Valley, working to create nearly a dozen pathways.



ERNESTINA "ERNIE" DIAZ
EL NIDO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ernie is a 1st Grade Teacher at El Nido Elementary who knows that teaching is a profession that takes dedication and flexibility and is very rewarding. She is constantly looking at ways to improve through professional development opportunities and feedback while also being open to new ideas and programs.

TEACHER HONOREES



MELODY NOCETI
GUSTINE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Melody is an English Teacher at Gustine High School who also serves as a Site Leader Teacher and the yearbook advisor. Under her leadership, she and her student team have won national awards for their interactive yearbook. Melody's classes include quality, high-level instruction and respect among all learners.



STEFANIE WEDDE
LIVINGSTON UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Stefanie is a Science Teacher at Livingston Middle School and enjoys sharing her joy of science with the younger generation. She believes that the more students can experience, the better they are able to understand and remember what they learned. Stefanie's students' say she is a teacher who tries to make every lesson fun.



LUCIA OLGUIN
MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION – EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Lucia is an English, ELD and Math Teacher at Valley Community School, Los Banos. Lucia believes teaching is about making profound connections with students that enables them to become passionate and driven. Her classroom management skills enable her to keep students on task and interested.



LISA WEBER
WEAVER UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Lisa is a 1st grade Teacher at Pioneer Elementary School who is patient, kind, realistic and understanding with her students. She provides a caring learning environment, demonstrating mutual respect for all. It's important to Lisa that she instills the love of learning in young minds.





EMPLOYEE *of the* YEAR



MARICELA PÉREZ
Merced Union
High School District

As the Spanish Community Resource Liaison at Atwater High School, Maricela works with the entire campus community. She is the liaison among teachers, counselors, administrators and students. Though she does build relationships with students based on trust and respect, her most impactful work is the relationship she builds with parents. Maricela works to strengthen that relationship and bridge the communication gap between staff and families

because there may be a language barrier or other issue. Many students and families can relate to Maricela because she has been in their shoes. Maricela was a migrant student and struggled in school but was able to overcome her barriers. She believes it gives her credibility and gives students and families hope. She believes that an involved parent means an engaged student, and an engaged student is a successful student.





ADMINISTRATOR *of the* YEAR



RHONDA SULLIVAN
Dos Palos-Oro Loma
Joint Unified School District

equipment at Dos Palos Elementary, which means more funds can be used in the classrooms. Rhonda always promotes student well-being and encourages others to do what is in the best interest of students. She is always thinking of them and pushing for ways to ensure students are well fed, safe and ready to learn.

Rhonda is the Director of Food Services for Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District. Rhonda's staff knows that she is always there for them. She is a hands-on, supportive administrator who will help with any problem at work or in their personal lives. Rhonda will step in and do what is needed to get the job done and wants to lead by example. She recently worked with the district grant writer and they were able to secure a large grant to update kitchen





TEACHER *of the* YEAR



SAMANTHA JOHNSTON
Merced Union
High School District

Samantha is a Resource Teacher at Independence High School in Merced. At the beginning of each year, Samantha strives to make students feel safe and begins building trust in their relationship through authentic engagement. Samantha gets to know her students and attempts to look at everything through their eyes to improve student outcomes. Samantha's priority is her students and building a connection or getting their buy-in is what makes her classroom

successful. If a student wants to gain employment, she helps them with a resume and important job skills. If a student wants to go to college, she helps connect them to resources like financial aid and the application process. Samantha does what is best for the student, meets them where they are and builds from there.





SPECIAL THANKS

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AWARD ARTIST

Clement J. Renzi

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