



EXCELLENCE
IN EDUCATION

MERCED COUNTY

2025

Merced Theatre
Thursday, October 2, 2025

Steve M. Tietjen, Ed.D.

COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS



Welcome to the Excellence in Education awards — an evening that celebrates exemplary teachers, school employees and school administrators from across the county. The individuals honored tonight represent the best in education. Their contributions not only benefit students, families and communities, but the entire education system as a whole.

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 a wonderful opportunity for us to come together to recognize and celebrate the exceptional educators and school staff throughout Merced County who educate, mentor and inspire our youth.

EECU has proudly co-sponsored this awards ceremony since 2006 and it is our honor to be part of this special event to acknowledge the efforts and contributions of the many dedicated individuals who guide our students toward a bright future. Congratulations to all of the nominees, finalists and winners on this well-deserved recognition.

Schedule of Events

Steve Tietjen, Ed.D.

*Merced County
Superintendent of Schools*

Opening Comments

Cub Scout Pack 96

Presentation of Colors

Marcella Beltrán

Merced High 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**

Ryan Heller

Master of Ceremonies

2025 Recognitions

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

Employee Honorees



Dedra Alvarez

**Library Media Specialist
Atwater Elementary School District**

Dedra has the outstanding ability to meet the ever-changing needs of the school community. Whether she's integrating new technology into the library or meeting with students, she tackles each challenge with a calm, solution-oriented attitude. Her willingness to embrace change and remain open to student input ensures that the library remains a dynamic and engaging learning space for all students.



Ana Guillen

**Principal's Secretary
Delhi Unified School District**

Ana has served the district in a wide range of roles during the past two decades, showcasing her adaptability and dedication. Her extensive experience speaks volumes about her knowledge of the school system and has allowed her to remain composed and supportive even in the most challenging situations. All of her qualities inspire those around her and make her an invaluable part of the district.



David Borba

**Maintenance/Custodial Worker
Gustine Unified School District**

David works tirelessly to ensure that the school facilities are clean, safe and well-maintained. No matter how big or small the task, he is ready to help without hesitation. In addition to his daily responsibilities, David also transports students experiencing homelessness to and from school. Though much of his work happens outside of the classroom, the positive impact he has on student learning and the school community is undeniable.



Taylor Roelofs

**Computer Technician
Los Banos Unified School District**

Taylor is described as not only an expert in his field, but as the cornerstone of the school community. He works with staff and students to assist with a variety of technology issues, often going beyond his job description. Whether he's troubleshooting technology, managing the school's website or producing creative student training videos, Taylor does it all with a sense of humor and infectious energy that brings joy to both staff and students.

Employee Honorees



Melissa Reyes

**Human Resources Specialist
Merced County Office of Education**

Melissa's ability to work collaboratively and her deep understanding of human resources, hiring processes and the evolving landscape of education policies, have contributed to the department's recruitment success and has strengthened the County Office's capacity to serve the community. Her willingness to go out of her way to either support a teammate or help an employment candidate exemplifies the spirit of dedication and service.



Michael Herrera

**Head Custodian
Merced City School District**

Mike is the embodiment of hard work and integrity in his role as Head Custodian at Cruickshank Middle School, where he maintains a clean, safe and welcoming environment for students, staff and families. His punctuality, respect and reliability set the standard for others and as both the Head Custodian and coach for the Varsity Softball Team. Mike is considered an integral part of the entire school community.



Yingpor Xiong

**Paraprofessional
Merced Union High School District**

Yingpor is best known for his upbeat energy and positive attitude, which uplifts both students and staff. That coupled with the ability to easily simplify academic concepts, inspires his students to reach their goals. He routinely goes out of his way to support students in and out of the classroom, from offering extra help with assignments and providing emotional support to organizing school events.

Administrator Honorees



Kevin Jones

**Administrator of Alternative Education
Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District**

Kevin is widely recognized as someone who leads with unwavering support and empathy, which has helped him create a workspace where every team member feels valued and empowered to do their best. He is committed to encouraging personal growth and professional development for his staff and often provides them with the resources, feedback and opportunities they need to advance their skills and strive for excellence.



Duane Habecker

**Director of Continuous Improvement
Merced County Office of Education**

Duane's previous role as Senior Mathematics Coordinator has redefined Mathematics curriculum not only in Merced County, but also across the state. He is driven by the belief that everyone deserves to enjoy math, recognize its value and experience the opportunities it offers. Now in his role as Director of Continuous Improvement, he continues to inspire and support the growth of educators and students throughout the region.



Bryan Behn

**Director Of Facilities
Merced City School District**

From the moment Bryan joined the MCSDD team, he did not hesitate to lead several ongoing modernization projects with confidence and efficiency. He played a key role in the successful passage of the district's most recent bond measure all while maintaining a professional and empathetic demeanor. Even now, Bryan remains proactive in maximizing opportunities for current and future facilities projects, making him an invaluable member of the team.



Lea Smith

**Associate Principal
Merced Union High School District**

Lea has helped create a vibrant school culture, transformed professional development for teachers and refined program structures. Her leadership has improved collaboration among staff and helped establish the Project-Based Learning cohort, a team that creates real-world learning experiences for students. Lea's influence has helped build a foundation that ensures the school community remains focused, organized and forward-thinking.

Teacher Honorees



Rosanne Cantwell

Math Teacher (8th Grade)
Atwater Elementary School District

With 28 years of experience, Rosanne has established a learning environment where students feel valued and celebrated for their differences. Her teaching philosophy revolves around the belief that every student, regardless of their ability, has the potential to succeed. Her lessons not only teach the fundamentals of mathematics, but also help students develop skills they can use well beyond the classroom.



Corinna Delgadillo

Preschool Teacher
Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District

Corinna's love for teaching is evident in how she greets each student with warmth and enthusiasm. Her attitude helps create a positive classroom culture where students feel seen and respected. In her classroom, learning goes hand in hand with character development and Corinna instills her students with the importance of empathy, determination and mutual respect. Skills that help them grow not only as learners but as people.



Norma Zavala

Teacher (6th Grade)
Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District

As a teacher of 20 years, Norma has played a pivotal role in curriculum development and distinguished herself as an outstanding mentor to both her students and colleagues. Her ability to engage with students both in and outside the classroom has allowed her to make lasting connections and build a safe educational space. Her impact is felt by students, colleagues and the entire community.



Ana Vega-Torres

Teacher (5th Grade)
El Nido Elementary School District

Ana encourages her students to reach their highest academic potential. She collaborates with staff and local organizations to create meaningful opportunities for students. Including founding and coaching the school's Spirit Squad. Though Ana's career as a teacher is still young, she has already established herself as an educator whose guidance will inspire students for years to come.

Teacher Honorees



Craig Beevers

**History Teacher (7th and 8th Grade)
Gustine Unified School District**

Craig is always willing to take on additional responsibilities to support fellow educators and contribute to a positive learning environment. Outside the classroom, Craig coaches baseball at Gustine High School and offers afterschool photography lessons for students. Craig's role as an educator, coach and mentor exemplifies the qualities that make him an outstanding teacher and person.



Daniel Ellersick

**Teacher (6th Grade)
Los Banos Unified School District**

Daniel has built a reputation as an outstanding teacher known for his rigorous teaching standards and unwavering commitment to his students' success. In addition to teaching, Daniel volunteers as a basketball coach at Westside Elementary School. His positive influence in all aspects of education reaffirms his commitment to nurture well-rounded students who can excel both in and out of the classroom.



Marisela Gamble

**Special Education Teacher (Adult)
Merced County Office of Education**

Marisela teaches the county's special education students valuable vocational skills and helps place them in jobs. Beyond her professional responsibilities, Marisela coordinates dances and events for students as well as oversees the school gardening program and a support group for parents of children with special needs. Her care, vast knowledge and support is a lifeline for many families in the community.



Elizabeth Aviz

**Resource Specialist (TK-3)
McSwain Union Elementary School District**

As a Resource Specialist, Elizabeth is an invaluable asset to her school community and demonstrates exceptional dedication, patience and professionalism in supporting students with diverse learning, behavioral and social needs. Her ability to differentiate learning for each student and create a classroom that is positive, warm and inclusive gives students of all abilities the opportunity to succeed.

Teacher Honorees



Michelle Hemphill

**Resource Specialist (8th Grade)
Merced City School District**

Michelle is not only a mentor and source of encouragement for her students, but she is also a huge asset to her team at Cruickshank Middle School. She has a deep understanding of her students' unique needs and adjusts her instruction so that they can meet and exceed their potential. Michelle understands that though she may only play a small role in her students' lives, she takes her responsibility very seriously.



Jenifer Tapia Tirado

**Preschool Teacher
Merced City School District**

Jenifer believes that each student's ability, learning style, cultural background and home life are all important factors to take into account when planning her lessons. She often thinks outside the box to design fun activities that appeal to their interests. She also volunteers for student events like the STEAM Fair and Writing Festival. Her classroom is described as full of hands-on activities, playful experiences and happy students.



Brianna Pivrotto

**Special Education Induction Mentor (9th - 12th Grades)
Merced Union High School District**

Brianna consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting students with special needs, mentoring other educators and working to create an inclusive learning environment. Brianna ensures that every student has access to the support they need to thrive by adapting instructional materials and collaborating with families to build a comprehensive support system for students of all abilities.

Teacher Honorees



Crissy Marshall

Teacher (1st Grade)
Weaver Union School District

Many of Crissy's colleagues speak of her warmth, humor and ability to make people feel valued. Beyond the classroom, she has helped orchestrate school performances, led choreography and gave all students the opportunity to shine. Years from now, Crissy will be remembered not just for her devotion to her students or performances she helped bring to life, but for how she made everyone feel welcomed and supported.



My Xiong

Preschool Teacher
Weaver Union School District

My creates a classroom environment where every child feels safe. Her lessons are balanced between supporting her young students' academics and establishing a sense of community, empathy and respect among them. She broadens their worldviews by honoring holidays from diverse cultures and teaching them other traditions. Her work as an educator, colleague and valued community member earned her the title of Merced County Preschool Teacher of the Year.



EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



NANCY DE LOS REYES

Principal Secretary
Weaver Union School District

Nancy is described as the heart and soul of Pioneer Elementary School. As the first person visitors meet when they arrive on campus, it's Nancy's job to set the tone for their visit. She welcomes everyone with her signature smile, warmth and positivity. Even during the most difficult days, Nancy remains calm, collected and ready to help in anyway she can.

Her upbeat attitude is enough to brighten anyone's day, whether through a thoughtful affirmation, kind word of encouragement or funny comment, anyone who enters the front office can be sure that they are in kind, supportive hands. Nancy's strength lies not only in her ability to stay grounded but also in her capacity to lead by example, ensuring that others keep the safety and well-being of both students and staff as their top priority. Whether she's coordinating substitutes, handling last minute emergencies or making funny announcements over the intercom, Nancy brings a level of care and dedication that goes far beyond her job description. Her kindness, enthusiasm, humor and passion for the school make her more than deserving of this honor.



ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR



ANA BOYENGA

**Assistant Superintendent of
Educational Services
Atwater Elementary School District**

With 31 years of service at AESD, Ana has built a reputation as a strong leader known for her communication, collaboration, strong leadership and a cheerleader for all. All attributes that helped develop and implement successful programs across all AESD

schools. Ana is particularly a passionate advocate for early education and has championed several preschool and transitional kindergarten initiatives, ensuring that young learners start strong in their education. She has also played a key role in expanding student engagement through enrichment activities and has led the charge to make performing arts, music and visual arts accessible to all students. Ana was central to launching the district's first Dual Language Immersion program and continues to advocate for resources to support and strengthen it. Ana works tirelessly to make sure every program is accessible, sustainable and enriching for all students.



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TEACHER OF THE YEAR



LILIA PULIDO FERNÁNDEZ

**Dual Language Immersion
Teacher (5th grade)
Delhi Unified School District**

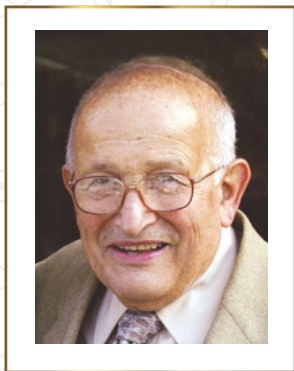
Lilia has more than 20 years of dedicated service to the educational field and in that time remained a strong pillar of compassion, knowledge and unwavering commitment to her students and to her colleagues.

In today's complex educational landscape, she stands out as a beacon of empathy and understanding. Lilia stays aware of her students' emotional needs, academic strengths and personal challenges they may face outside of the classroom. Her approach to teaching is deeply intentional and her lessons are thoughtfully designed to meet each of their unique needs. For example, Lilia teaches her students how to manage stress and anxiety by practicing breathing exercises with them during class. She believes that if she has made a positive difference in a student's life by the end of the school year, in any capacity, whether academically, socially or emotionally, she has fulfilled her purpose as an educator.



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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

SELECTION COMMITTEE

Steve Roussos | Irene Beattie | Colton Dennis

AWARD ARTIST

Clement J. Renzi

PRESENTATION OF COLORS AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

Cub Scout Pack 96 | Marcella Beltrán - Merced High School

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Office *of* Education

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



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