



**RIVERSIDE COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

EDWIN GOMEZ, Ed.D. | County Superintendent of Schools

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

CELEBRATING  
2023 EDUCATORS

LUNCHEON

**Riverside Convention Center**

3637 Fifth Street | Riverside

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**Tuesday, May 2, 2023**

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

## **OUR PLEDGE**

**Every student in Riverside County  
will graduate from high school academically  
and socially prepared for college, the workforce,  
and civic responsibility.**

## **RIVERSIDE COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

**Edwin Gomez, Ed.D.**

## **RIVERSIDE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**Barbara Hale, President  
Ray "Coach" Curtis, Vice President  
Kim J. Cousins, Member  
Bruce N. Dennis, Member  
Jamie Azpeitia-Sachs, Member  
Ben Johnson II, Member  
Elizabeth F. Romero, Member**

# PROGRAM

This special recognition luncheon is an opportunity for our county's K-12 education community and partners to come together and recognize some of public education's outstanding educators. District nominees from each category will be recognized along with the 2023 Riverside County Educators of the Year.

## **STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

### **Coachella Valley Jazz Ensemble**

*Coachella Valley High School*

*Coachella Valley Unified School District*

## **WELCOME**

## **PRESENTATION OF COLORS**

### **Air Force Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps**

*Beaumont High School*

*Beaumont Unified School District*

## **REMARKS**

Edwin Gomez, Ed.D.

Riverside County Superintendent of Schools

## **AWARDS CEREMONY**



## JEANINE WINGFIELD

**District Security Officer II  
Val Verde Unified School District**

When Jeanine Wingfield finds out a student can't afford a prom ticket, or is having difficulty paying for their graduation cap and gown, she springs into action—oftentimes opening her own wallet to pick up the bill. Before a big game or student performance, Jeanine has been known to show her support for students by delivering goodie bags of treats on the big day.

Beyond her role as a district security officer, Jeanine enjoys serving as an emotional support partner for students to feel safe at school. Administrators on campus send all new district security personnel to train with Jeanine because she represents the example they want to set for all staff.

From early morning arrivals, to late-evening activities, Jeanine ensures the safety of all personnel through prevention, observation, and reporting activities on the busy Rancho Verde High School campus, where she also serves on the Culture and Climate committee.

**Jeanine's Message:** *Life is riddled with many gifts, but my favorite of them all is the gift of giving. Throughout my years in education, I was given the honor of meeting and working with a lot of stellar staff and community members. Gifted with their presence has truly convinced me that "Alone we can do so little; but together we can do so much" as Helen Keller said. I cannot thank my peers enough for being receptive to my revolutionary leadership style. They are also the motivating force in striving to reach the highest level of public service I can achieve. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the students of Val Verde USD for allowing me to be a part of their academic journey. I understand the severity of our positions as we're supporting and creating the future leaders of the world. Without them, there is no us.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 Classified Employee of the Year Nominees

- Don Ainsworth, Storekeeper, Warehouse Department, Palo Verde USD
- Jayme Allec, Custodian III, Ridgemoor Elementary School, Menifee Union SD
- Mellissa Ballard-Colyn, Paraeducator, Glenn Middle School, Desert Sands USD
- Amber Ballesteros, Counseling Technician, Chaparral High School, Temecula Valley USD
- Antonia Campuzano, Grants and Projects Technician, Educational Services, Corona-Norco USD
- Tammie Dye, Senior Accountant Clerk, Eagle Mountain Elementary School, Desert Center USD
- Elisabeth Fair, Office Manager, Valley View Elementary School, Nuvview Union SD
- Patricia Ford, Elementary Principal Secretary, Cabazon Elementary School, Banning USD
- Delia Garcia, Preschool Aide, Rob Reiner Children and Families Center, Perris Elementary SD
- Fabiola Gil, Administrative Specialist, Coachella Valley High School, Coachella Valley USD
- Lindsey Hopson, Senior Buyer, Jurupa USD
- Lori Johnson, Campus Security I, Palm Innovation Academy, Beaumont USD
- Annmarie Lopez, Secretary, Transportation, Murrieta Valley USD
- Ashley Merrill, Library Technician, Mesa View Elementary School, Romoland SD
- Edgar J. Ramos, Accounting Technician, Palm Springs USD
- Lesa Richer, Office/School Secretary, Don F. Kenny Regional Learning Center, Riverside COE
- Luis Robles, Campus Supervisor I, Paloma Valley High School, Perris Union High SD
- Valentin Sanchez, Custodian I/Utility Worker, Jose Antonio Estudillo Elementary School, San Jacinto USD
- Sandra Sandoval, Health Technician, Donald Graham Elementary School, Lake Elsinore USD
- Ivan Santiago De La Rosa, Digital Copy System Operator II, Publications, Riverside USD
- Claudia Silva, Switchboard Operator/Receptionist, Canyon Springs High School, Moreno Valley USD
- Tania Villarreal, Bilingual Assistant, Promenade Elementary School, Alvord USD
- Jeanine Wingfield, District Security Officer II, Rancho Verde High School, Val Verde USD
- Paulette Zetina, Administrative Secretary III, Professional Development Academy, Hemet USD



## APRYLLE LARSON

**Executive Assistant, Instruction and Support Services  
Beaumont Unified School District**

Although Aprylle Larson has only served for three years in her current role, each of her previous roles in the district's Career and Technical Education program, and as a Library Multimedia Technician at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, has prepared her to better serve the entire community with excellence. Aprylle sees her role as a power outlet—serving as a conduit to connect students, parents, and staff, with the power they need to succeed.

Beyond the day-to-day responsibilities as the top administrative support in the division, Aprylle helps coordinate the Student of the Month activities, science fair, spelling bee, and an annual film festival. Her technology expertise and library experience have connected her with opportunities to lead professional development trainings each month for colleagues on how to integrate new technology into their individual and collective skill sets.

**Aprylle's Message:** *I am incredibly honored to accept this recognition, and I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who has helped me along the way. Ebon, your mentorship and guidance have been invaluable to me, and I am truly grateful for your unwavering support. Your leadership has inspired me to strive for excellence, and your confidence in my abilities drives me to push myself further. To my colleagues, working with you is an enriching experience, and I learn so much from your zeal and dedication. And lastly, to my family, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for your unconditional love and support. You have been my rock throughout this journey, and I could not have done it without you and your sacrifices. This recognition is a humbling reminder of the many blessings in my life.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 Confidential Employee of the Year Nominees

- Diana Aguilar, Recruitment Specialist - Classified, Human Resources, Coachella Valley USD
- Sandra Birmingham, Human Resources Administrative Assistant, Palo Verde USD
- Gabriela Burrell, Assistant Superintendent's Secretary, Personnel Services, Menifee Union SD
- Christina Castro, Human Resources Analyst, Human Resources, Moreno Valley USD
- Mercedes Estrada, Human Resources Technician, Education Center, Jurupa USD
- Christine Fierro, Personnel Technician - Confidential, Personnel Services, San Jacinto USD
- Linda Hawkins, Sr. Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, Superintendent's Office, Corona-Norco USD
- Wendy Hufferd, Human Resources Technician, Hemet USD
- Aprylle Larson, Executive Assistant, Instruction and Support Services, Beaumont USD
- Patty Leon, Budget Specialist, Desert Sands USD
- Esmeralda Nochez, Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources, Val Verde USD
- Veronica Ocegueda, Confidential Secretary, Business Services, Perris Elementary SD
- Judiel Sanchez, Superintendent's Secretary, Superintendent's Office, Lake Elsinore USD
- Lisa Twarog, Executive Assistant I, Personnel, Riverside USD
- Edith Valencia, Executive Assistant, Banning USD
- Nadia Zeien, Director, Purchasing, Business/Operations, Murrieta Valley USD



## MICHELLE DAPHNE DONOHO

Principal, Táawila Elementary School  
Menifee Union School District

Michelle Daphne Donoho has served as a principal for nearly 20 years—including as the first principal of Táawila Elementary School in the Menifee Union School District when it opened in 2018. At every school she has led, Daphne has garnered state and national awards for school success. An emphasis on data-driven decision-making and professional development for teachers has been key to the success for students at Táawila—including a focus on writing and literacy instruction, and what is known on campus as the “Six Tight Commitments” to educational excellence that shape daily instruction.

Daphne’s focus on relationships is a hallmark of her leadership style—a professional and personal value she also instills into others where she serves as a mentor leader for up-and-coming administrators in Riverside County.

**Daphne’s Message:** *What an honor it is to have been selected as a recipient of the Riverside County Principal of the Year Award. As I enter my 25th year in education, legacy and impact are heavy on my heart. I am lucky enough to live in the same community where I have served as principal for three different schools. For me, leading schools in the community where I live has deepened my sense of commitment and obligation to ensure that I am providing the very best for all students, treating each family as if they are my own.*

*This recognition has given me a renewed sense of energy and purpose, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to work alongside amazing people every day and make a difference.*

*I will always cherish this award and use it as a reminder of the importance of heart, teamwork, dedication, and community.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 Principal of the Year Nominees

- Gerardo Aguilar, McAuliffe Elementary School, Alvord USD
- Eric Antuna, Agua Caliente Elementary School, Palm Springs USD
- Maria Arreola, Armada Elementary School, Moreno Valley USD
- Dr. Alexis J. Barile, Centennial High School, Corona-Norco USD
- Dawn Brawley, Emerson Elementary School, Riverside USD
- Ekko DePriest, McSweeney Elementary School, Hemet USD
- Sean Dickinson, Mountain View Middle School, Beaumont USD
- Michelle Daphne Donoho, Táawila Elementary School, Menifee Union SD
- Elisa Gentry, Saul Martinez Elementary School, Coachella Valley USD
- Dr. Ileana Gutierrez, Hemmerling Elementary School, Banning USD
- Victoria G. Jobe, Indian Hills Elementary School, Jurupa USD
- Arthur Kimball, Alternative Education, Riverside COE
- Robert Lurkins, Murrieta Elementary School, Murrieta Valley USD
- Kelley Pebley, Perris Elementary School, Perris Elementary SD
- Dr. Melissa Pizano-Grunnet, Van Buren Elementary School, Desert Sands USD
- Cintia Robinson, Ruth Brown Elementary School, Palo Verde USD
- Gilbert Rodriguez, Canyon Lake Middle School, Lake Elsinore USD
- Amy Rose, Park Hill Elementary School, San Jacinto USD
- Dr. Erika Tejeda, Liberty High School, Perris Union High SD
- Natalie Waddell, Abby Reinke Elementary School, Temecula Valley USD
- Dr. Gregory Wise, Nuview Bridge Early College High School, Nuview Union SD
- Joshua Workman, Orange Vista High School, Val Verde USD



## DWIGHT TAYLOR

**Campus Security Officer II/District Lead Officer  
Moreno Valley Unified School District**

In a previous position at Moreno Valley Unified School District, Dwight Taylor was named as the 2017 Riverside County Classified Employee of the Year. After being promoted to his current position, Dwight's excellence continues to shine as he collaborates daily with multiple school sites, students, and administrators, to provide safety and security services. Dwight's impact stretches far beyond his "beat" with involvement in the Freedom Writer program, as a mentor, a youth pastor, and as a bridge to community organizations that serve students and families.

Dwight's professional focus on becoming a supervisor who leads with empathy, is evident in his de-escalation expertise utilizing restorative practices, and through his involvement in the district's chapter of the California School Employees Association. His willingness to share his life journey with others serves as a reminder of the power of education to overcome any barriers.

**Dwight's Message:** *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Whatever your life's work is, do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn, could do it no better." I strive to be the best I can be, and to help as many people as I can, but I do not do it alone. I want to say thank you to my beautiful wife and my children. Their support allows me to do what I do daily. I want to thank my Beat partner Jason Neal, and the amazing ladies in my department who help us day in and day out. Thank you to my Director, Superintendent, and Cabinet, the Board, administrators, secretaries, officers, students, and parents. It is truly a team effort. Working with amazing people allows me to work at my best. I'm truly blessed. Thank you RCOE for acknowledging outstanding educators.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 Site Support Employee of the Year Nominees

- Nancy Arroyo, Bilingual Resource Teacher, Education Center, Jurupa USD
- Carol Coyne, Health and Wellness Educator, Student Services, Corona-Norco USD
- Grace Crider, Instructional Coach, Mesa View Elementary School, Romoland SD
- Cristina Geronimo, Intensive Behavior Intervention Specialist, Special Education, Riverside COE
- Hannah Johnson, Instructional Coach, Central Elementary School, Banning USD
- Donna Jones, Licensed Vocational Nurse, Palo Verde High School, Palo Verde USD
- Elizabeth Lingafelter, District Nurse, San Jacinto USD
- Mary Martinez, Health Services Technician, John Kelley Elementary School, Coachella Valley USD
- Sean McCarthy, Coordinator, Educational Services, Murrieta Valley USD
- Olivia Orozco, Instructional Coach, Beaumont USD
- Elon Parker, Speech-Language Pathologist, Special Education, Riverside COE
- Christy Raway, TOSA - Elementary Special Education, Educational Services, Hemet USD
- Laura Rodriguez, Office Specialist, Desert Sands USD
- Jennifer Romero, TOSA - English Learner Program, Educational Support Services, Temecula Valley USD
- Meaghan Smith, School Psychologist, Psychological Services, Riverside USD
- Mark Synnott, Coordinator, Educational Services, Perris Union High SD
- Dwight Taylor, Campus Security Officer II/District Lead Officer, Moreno Valley USD
- Cassandra Tejera, Social Worker/Therapist, Nuvview Union SD
- Danielle M. Vasquez, Speech-Language Pathologist, Southshore Elementary School, Menifee Union SD
- Jennifer Wholley, Elementary Literacy Teacher, Promenade Elementary School, Alvard USD
- Sandra L. Wiemeyer, Speech and Language Pathologist, Cahuilla Elementary School, Palm Springs USD
- Quantrell Willis, TOSA - African American Parent Engagement Specialist, Educational Services, Val Verde USD



## HILDA JAUREGUI-CASTANON

**School Counselor, Eleanor Roosevelt High School  
Corona-Norco Unified School District**

Despite serving as a school counselor at the largest high school in Riverside County, Hilda Jauregui-Castanon steps into each day with the goal of ensuring that none of the nearly 5,000 students at Eleanor Roosevelt High School (ERHS) or the eSTEM Academy will go unseen or unserved.

Hilda's experience as a first generation student led her to develop the PUENTE Program at ERHS to support the success of minority students in high school, and prepare them for post-secondary success. Her colleagues and students describe her as a "go-to" counselor whose influence with students is just as impactful with colleagues, teachers, parents, and administrators.

Beyond the human-centered approach of a student-focused school counselor, Hilda is equally focused on building structures and systems to sustain support through the use of data to root out barriers to education before they interfere with learning.

**Hilda's Message:** *It is an absolute honor to be recognized as Riverside County's School Counselor of the Year. I am truly humbled and grateful for this acknowledgement as it is a proud moment in my professional career. It encourages me to continue to strive for excellence in my work with students, families, and staff.*

*I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the ERHS Counseling team for their tireless efforts towards helping build a comprehensive counseling program focused on student success and modeled after the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). I am grateful for the amazing leaders who have inspired me to always do my best, and of course, my amazing husband and family who always support me in all my endeavors. This recognition is a testament to the unwavering support and inspiration I receive from each and every one of you. Once again, thank you for this incredible honor.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 School Counselor of the Year Nominees

- Amy Allen, Hamilton High School, Hemet USD
- Ciro Calderon, Toro Canyon Middle School, Coachella Valley USD
- Stephen Castillo, Agua Caliente Elementary School, Palm Springs USD
- Sara Duenas, San Jacinto High School, San Jacinto USD
- Joel Godoy, Nuvview Elementary School, Nuvview Union SD
- Deidre Hanson, University Heights Middle School, Riverside USD
- Ashley Holguin-Stiles, North Ridge Elementary School, Moreno Valley USD
- Kalissa Jardine, Hemmerling Elementary School, Banning USD
- Hilda Jauregui-Castanon, Eleanor Roosevelt High School, Corona-Norco USD
- Larissa Jefferson, Keith McCarthy Academy, Lake Elsinore USD
- Francina Kelly, Perris Elementary School, Perris Elementary SD
- Jennifer Krumheuer, James L. Day Middle School, Temecula Valley USD
- Eugene Lin, Palm Innovation Academy, Beaumont USD
- Blanca Maldonado, District Education Center, Desert Sands USD
- Dinora Mendoza-Montoya, Murrieta Valley High School, Murrieta Valley USD
- Edgardo Moreno Jr., Mission Middle School, Jurupa USD
- Jamechia Prater-Moril, Alternative Education, Riverside COE
- Javier Rubalcava, Twin Palms Continuation High School, Palo Verde USD
- Alexandra Sevilla, Menifee Valley Middle School, Menifee Union SD
- Jonnie Belinda Thomas, Sierra Vista Elementary School and Val Verde Elementary School, Val Verde USD
- Jaclyn Vander Veen, Terrace Elementary School, Alvord USD
- William Warren, Paloma Valley High School, Perris Union High SD





## CRAIG PETINAK

Director, Public Relations and Communications Services  
Riverside County Office of Education

Craig Petinak doesn't just work for the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) and the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools. His work has a ripple effect across all 23 districts in the county that uplifts the excellence and heart within public education.

Now in his 10th year at RCOE, Craig's human-centered work blends the creative and strategic with the tactical and timely. From crisis communications and authoring press releases, to leading video productions and crafting internal newsletters, Craig also supports the school public relations professionals within each district to help them elevate their own schools, students, programs, and communications expertise.

With his award-winning team of creative designers, communicators, and video producers, Craig is an unofficial chief storyteller for the transformational impact of education on the lives of individuals, the community, and society as a whole.

**Craig's Message:** *Bob Burg once said, "Your influence is determined by how abundantly you place other people's interests first." The swiveling of this spotlight around to shine on my team, and our collective efforts, fundamentally conflicts with my approach of humbly lifting up those around me every single day. None of these accolades happen without an award-winning team that is as focused on the work, as we are on helping each other succeed. Thank you for bringing the best of yourselves to work every day and helping me to do the same.*

*I'd like to thank the mentors in my life who have inspired me to keep growing, the three county superintendents who have given me the opportunity to raise the bar for communications within the organization and the county, and my family of educators for encouraging me to give of myself and my God-given gifts to elevate all those around me.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 Classified Administrator of the Year Nominees

- La Sonya Brummell-Pitts, Executive Director, Human Resources, Palm Springs USD
- James Burleson, Director III, Transportation, Moreno Valley USD
- Linda Contreras, Supervisor, Personnel Services, Menifee Union SD
- Brittany Foust, Communications Manager, Corona-Norco USD
- Craig Frame, Executive Director, Human Resources, Murrieta Valley USD
- Adria Galarza, Coordinator, Children and Family Services, Lake Elsinore USD
- James Heckman, Assistant Director of Technology, Perris Union High SD
- Andrea Hernandez, Benefits/Payroll Supervisor, Beaumont USD
- Charles Howe, Operations Supervisor, Warehouse, Perris Elementary SD
- Janet Jungnickel, Director, Nutrition Services, Hemet USD
- Korey Lawson, Assistant Director, Facilities and Operations, San Jacinto USD
- Charles J. Lusin III, Manager of Systems, Technology Services, Riverside USD
- Cindy Maldonado, Director of Human Resources, Classified, Coachella Valley USD
- Tiffany Martinez, Director, Human Resources Development, Temecula Valley USD
- Judy Meza, Director, Nutrition Services, Nuview Union SD
- Craig Petinak, Director, Public Relations and Communications Services, Riverside COE
- Craig Pulsipher, Director, Nutrition Services, Banning USD
- Lizett Quintero, Field Supervisor, Food Services, Val Verde USD
- Karla Renovato, Payroll Manager, Alvord USD
- Michael Roark, Director of Network Administration, Jurupa USD
- Alex Tsubota, Director, Technology Department, Palo Verde USD
- Jane Yoshimura, Director of Graphic Services, Desert Sands USD



## CASSANDRA WILLIS

**Director, Student and Family Support Services and Family Engagement  
Corona-Norco Unified School District**

After nearly 30 years in education, Cassandra Willis believes she has the best job in the entire district. In her role as leader of the Parent Center at Corona-Norco Unified School District, she leads a team of professionals who are dedicated not only to ensuring that all students receive an education, but also to providing the means to overcome any barriers that might attempt to hinder their success.

Cassandra's experience spans the roles of teacher and administrator at almost every level of public education, and her selfless leadership style of leading with heart, humility, and by example, are evident in her words and deeds. Not content to simply use techniques and processes that worked in the majority of situations, Cassandra's innovative approaches to engaging with parents and families "where they are", has led to increased student attendance, engagement, and success.

**Cassandra's Message:** *I am beyond grateful and humbled to be selected as the Certificated Administrator of the Year. I want to thank my superintendent who continues to give me the opportunity to live out my passion of engaging families and empowering them to participate in the lives of children. I definitely have the best job in the district. To every mentor who has believed in me, and encouraged me to stay the course, I say thank you. I would also like to thank my Parent Center family who make coming to work a pure joy. This is not just a win for me, but for all of us. Thank you for trusting me to lead our work even when my ideas are somewhat unconventional. Most importantly, thank you to my Heavenly Father for giving me the talent and heart to serve with compassion. My story, my journey, is all for His glory.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 Certificated Administrator of the Year Nominees

- Candace Boulais, Coordinator, Special Education, Romoland SD
- Dulce Brenda Noriega, Director, English Language Learners and Categorical Programs, Educational Services, San Jacinto USD
- Jess Caponigro, Director, Student Welfare and Success, District Office, Temecula Valley USD
- Terrence Davis, Superintendent, Banning USD
- Martin DuSold, Athletic Director, Beaumont High School, Beaumont USD
- Laura Dyson, Director of Health Services, Palm Springs USD
- Jesenia Garcia Macias, Director, Child Development Program, Child Development Center, Nuview Union SD
- Dr. Julie Hong, Executive Director, Special Education, Menifee Union SD
- Dr. Kelly May-Vollmar, Superintendent, Desert Sands USD
- Faythe Mutchnick-Jayx, Executive Director, Educational Services, Murrieta Valley USD
- Sarah Nesvold, Coordinator, Special Education, Val Verde USD
- Monty Owens, Director, Educational Equity, Education Center, Jurupa USD
- Scott Payne, Director, Expanded Learning Programs, Student Support Services, Hemet USD
- Katarina Roy Schanz, Director IV, Wellness and Engagement, Riverside USD
- Myra Sanchez, Director III, Migrant Education, Riverside COE
- Michelle Sebastian, Director III, Special Education, Alvord USD
- Lois Shaffer, Director, Data, Assessment, and Accountability, Palo Verde USD
- Jazmina Villalta, Assistant Principal, Good Hope Elementary School and Enchanted Hills Elementary School, Perris Elementary SD
- Smiley Villavicencio, Director III, Professional Development and Digital Learning Center, Moreno Valley USD
- Cassandra Willis, Director, Student and Family Support Services and Family Engagement, Corona-Norco USD
- Marcella Zamudio, Director, Early Learners, Educational Services, Coachella Valley USD



## AUTUMN KHONG LUNDBLAD

Sundance Elementary School  
Beaumont Unified School District

For centuries, great architects have sought innovative ways to bring the outdoor world into indoor environments. For the purpose of shaping and building the minds of her students, Autumn Khong Lundblad has done just that—converting her classroom into a full-fledged “Camp Lundy” experience that fosters a love of learning along with a passion for the great outdoors, and prompts former students to describe her as “the teacher you’ll never forget.”

Unity, connectedness, teamwork, and a sense of family, were all associated with family camp trips for Autumn, thereby serving as her motivation to bring those values to her students.

Outside of the classroom, Autumn has co-directed the student choir, served on the PTA board, partnered with the Wildlands Conservancy at the Oak Glen Preserve, gathered holiday gifts for the Winter Wish Program, and organized class letter-writing campaigns to members of the military.

**Autumn’s Message:** *It is a great honor to be nominated by Beaumont USD and selected by RCOE as 2023 Riverside County Teacher of the Year. I am thankful for the acknowledgement and the opportunity to get to represent my hometown, Beaumont. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family, husband, Sundance peeps, and Camp Lundy students and their families, for all of their love and support. You’ve all been with me on my teaching adventure and have had a huge impact on my life. I am more grateful to you all than you’ll ever know. The relationships, connections, and bonds that we have formed over the years mean the world to me. I will strive to continue making you all proud by serving our community as an educator in hopes of instilling a love of learning in all of our students.*



## HEATHER HANLON

Dorothy McElhinney Middle School  
Murrieta Valley Unified School District

In 2007, Heather Hanlon was hired to build a dance program from the ground up at Lisa J. Mails Elementary School in Murrieta Valley Unified School District. The success of the program spilled over to the dance floor at the newly-constructed Dorothy McElhinney Middle School next door, where dancers of all shapes, sizes, and abilities, would soon learn everything from salsa and waltz to hip hop and ballet folklorico. In 2008, she created Dancefinity, one of the only middle school competitive dance programs in California.

Heather is a firm believer that “your physiology determines your psychology”, and she deploys this message to foster positive mental and physical health outcomes. Students in Heather’s inclusive-oriented class range from “reluctant dancers” and students with extraordinary needs, to athletes, artists, and adolescents, who are seeking a safe place to express themselves through body movement.

**Heather’s Message:** *I am filled with immense gratitude for being honored as Riverside County Teacher of the Year for 2023. I have had the pleasure to work alongside so many dedicated, passionate, and innovative educators and administrators in my twenty-one years with Murrieta Valley USD.*

*I am thankful for my mentor Michelle McCarthy. Her example of high-quality pedagogy while demonstrating the importance of relationship-centered teaching was critical in my development as an educator. Huge thanks to my administrators, you are the best! I am extremely grateful for my family and friends; their constant support and love makes everything more fulfilling. My husband Dave, there is no one I would rather have beside me in life. I love you! Teaching dance has been magical for me. My students and their families’ unwavering trust, enthusiasm, and resilience, has taught me so much, and drives me to do my best for them every day.*



## ANTHONY GOMEZ

**Jurupa Middle School  
Jurupa Unified School District**

For anyone who spends time with teenagers, “cringey” is usually not considered a positive description. But, for Anthony Gomez, hearing that adjective is when he knows he’s right on target with his next self-produced YouTube video to engage his students. As a dual-language immersion middle school history teacher, Anthony had difficulty locating multimedia content in Spanish to help history come alive in the classroom, so he created his own videos and started a channel called “Teaching Juntos”.

Anthony decided to become a teacher so that he could be a positive role model for immigrant students who found school challenging like he did as a child. At the same time, his dual language immersion students are learning about multiple cultures and mastering languages for college credit even before they set foot on a high school campus.

**Anthony’s Message:** *Thank you to all my great teachers that helped me overcome my “EL” label and become a successful college graduate. I thank God that I can be a part of the greatest profession on earth. I have no doubt in my mind that I was made with the purpose of being a teacher to JUSD students. It has been an honor to share so many great laughs, tears, and great memories with my students throughout my years as a teacher. Thank you to my dad for showing me how to be a hard worker and for my mom who always taught me to value education. Lastly, I want to say thank you to my wife. I love that she is also a teacher and that we get to bounce ideas off each other constantly as we seek to provide a better learning experience to our students year after year.*



## BETH SCHWANDT

**Lake Hills Elementary School  
Alvord Unified School District**

Beth Schwandt believes that vocal cords don’t have zip codes, and that musical talent never discriminates. As evidence, she’s had a conductor’s first-hand view of how music gives her students the courage to express themselves, empowers them to use their voice to tell their story, and subsequently improves brain activity, literacy, self-esteem, and much more. Throughout her career, she has developed show choir programs at multiple schools, while inviting students of any ability into her classroom, and on to the stage, to experience the power of music.

Beyond exposing students to the arts through field trips, plays, concerts, workshops, and performances that have embedded a rich passion and life-long love for music in their hearts, Beth’s greatest accomplishments have been recruiting, training, and mentoring new music teachers at every level.

**Beth’s Message:** *My love for Alvord has spanned over six decades. Our Air Force family landed in the orange groves of La Sierra, where I started as a student in the 1970’s. Parenting and teaching in our district filled the years with so much joy! I have been blessed beyond imagination on this journey, far exceeding anything I could have ever hoped or dreamed. My dear husband and I proudly raised our four children in the same schools that invested in us. My first teachers were my parents, who taught me everything I needed to know about God, loving others, working hard, and sparking enthusiasm. My students are my calling, my purpose, my delight. I am forever indebted to my Alvord family, and the RCOE team led by Dr. Gomez, who have generously poured resources and support into our community so that we can better serve our most precious resource, our children.*

## CONGRATULATIONS to the 2023 Riverside County Teacher of the Year Nominees

- Rebecca Arrieta, Toro Canyon Middle School, Coachella Valley USD
- Mary Baez, Landmark Middle School, Moreno Valley USD
- Erika Baily, Saul Martinez Elementary School, Coachella Valley USD
- Maria Balcazar, Project T.E.A.M., Riverside USD
- Patricia Ball, Victress Bower School for Exceptional Students, Corona-Norco USD
- Kristen Bates, Cloverdale Elementary School, Moreno Valley USD
- Michael Chalukian, Moreno Valley Online Academy, Moreno Valley USD
- Elizabeth Coats, Della S. Lindley Elementary School, Palm Springs USD
- Susan Cook, Armada Elementary School, Moreno Valley USD
- Amber Cunningham, Rancho Vista High School, Temecula Valley USD
- Teresa Daniels, West Valley High School, Hemet USD
- Nancy Gabriel, Sky View Elementary School, Perris Elementary SD
- Thelma Gandara-Tatar, Evans Ranch Elementary School, Menifee Union SD
- Bethany Gibson, San Jacinto High School, San Jacinto USD
- Kayla Gleason, Citrus Hill High School, Val Verde USD
- Anthony Gomez, Jurupa Middle School, Jurupa USD
- Heather Hanlon, Dorothy McElhinney Middle School, Murrieta Valley USD
- Herman Hilkey, San Jacinto Leadership Academy, San Jacinto USD
- Carrie Holguin, Colonel Mitchell Paige Middle School, Desert Sands USD
- Holly Jenkins, Beaumont Adult School, Beaumont USD
- Autumn Khong Lundblad, Sundance Elementary School, Beaumont USD
- Rebecca Lane, Vista Murrieta High School, Murrieta Valley USD
- Myrna Lopez, Cottonwood Elementary School, Hemet USD
- Melissa Lowdermilk, Tâawila Elementary School, Menifee Union SD
- Jacqueline Mantz, Edward Wenzlaff Alternative Education Center, Palm Springs USD
- Corri Mowrer, Harvest Valley Elementary School, Romoland SD
- Sean Muhammad, Pinacate Middle School, Perris Union High SD
- Tina Naif, La Sierra High School, Alvord USD
- Christina Osborne, Horizon School, Desert Sands USD
- Cherie Oshita-Gruidl, E. Hale Curran Elementary School, Murrieta Valley USD
- Shauna Petersen, Eagle Mountain Elementary School, Desert Center USD
- Rachel Post, Pathways for Adult Life Skills, Perris Union High SD
- Bryan Reid, Centennial High School, Corona-Norco USD
- Melinda Robbins, Lee V. Pollard High School, Corona-Norco USD
- Roberto Ronquillo, Banning High School, Banning USD
- Katherine Runyan, Sierra Middle School, Riverside USD
- Isidro Saenz, Patriot High School, Jurupa USD
- Clifford Schaeffer, Valley View Elementary School, Nuvview Union SD
- Beth Schwandt, Lake Hills Elementary School, Alvord USD
- Maritza Sifuentes, Del Sol Academy, Jurupa USD
- Michelle Sofranko, Cawston Elementary School, Hemet USD
- Kellie Stowe, Triple Crown Elementary School, Val Verde USD
- Erica Tarapore, Philistine Rondo School of Discovery, Corona-Norco USD
- Amy Thomas, Erle Stanley Gardner Middle School, Temecula Valley USD
- Jeannette Vasquez, Norte Vista High School, Alvord USD
- Delena Wall, Liberty Elementary School, Riverside USD
- Nichelle Webb, Desert Hot Springs High School, Palm Springs USD
- Scott Winchell, Margaret White Elementary School, Palo Verde USD
- Dioscelina Zavala, La Familia High School, Coachella Valley USD

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Department Chair, Counseling  
Member Since 2014