

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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For Immediate Release

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Tulare County Office of Education Announces:

Countywide Excellence in Education Winners Announced

Teacher of the Year, School Employee of the Year and Administrator/Manager of the Year selected in annual awards program

A selection committee of Tulare County business and educational leaders met recently to review the Tulare County Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year and School Employee of the Year nominations for 2015. The Excellence in Education Awards program, now celebrating its 22nd year, honors “the best of the best” in the three educational categories. A total of 25 nominations were received this year from Tulare County school districts. Each nomination was reviewed and scored individually by every member of the selection committee.

“The winners are innovators dedicated to student engagement and success,” says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. “Each of these creative individuals have designed and fostered innovative programs to help students meet their greatest potential.”

Once the selection committee reviewed each nomination and the scores were tallied, County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak visited each of the winners to inform them of their award. The winners in the 2015 Excellence in Education program are:

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

WINNERS

Administrator of the Year: Leticia Trevino, Principal, Palm Elementary School, Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District

Palm Elementary principal Leticia Trevino is described by her nominators as an “Energizer Bunny” – a woman with boundless energy for her students, staff and parents. She is also praised as a visionary leader who carefully monitors the progress of each of the 700 students on her campus. Mrs. Trevino truly believes failure is not an option and that her role is to lead the charge for all students to succeed. She is credited for being the first principal to implement the district’s Instructional Rounds program, a self-analysis process which is credited for the school’s academic success. At Palm Elementary, students who are falling behind in the quarterly benchmarks are provided with an intervention instruction program that she instituted.

District Superintendent Yolanda Valdez reports that Mrs. Trevino understands that in order to have a successful educational system, parents must partner with the school. “She has implemented the Latino Literacy Parent Education System that has already graduated two classes,” said Mrs. Valdez. “She has also implemented monthly California State Standards Parent Education Nights. Parents participate in lessons, gaining insight into the ways students are learning math and English Language Arts.” Mrs. Trevino has also implemented the Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports program, a school wide Code of Conduct, and a culture of scholarly learning.

Mrs. Trevino led her staff and students as they transitioned from the 1997 California content standards to the new Common Core State Standards. During this process, she learned alongside her teachers about both English Language Arts and mathematics in order to provide guidance and assistance. On a daily basis, Mrs. Trevino can be found with her walkie-talkie in hand, visiting each classroom almost every day, interacting with students or leaving observational notes on teachers' desks. Tanya Goosev, the district’s assistant

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

superintendent of curriculum and program improvement says, “At any given moment, Leticia can tell you exactly where students are in their learning progression and how their teacher is monitoring student learning. She is a true "leader of learning" and keeps a daily pulse on how teachers are teaching and how students are responding. She is also a professional at gathering data evidence of student learning and working with her team to implement a response to instruction and intervention.”

“I continually remind adults of the servant roles we all have,” said Mrs. Trevino. “When selecting the admirable profession of teaching, we take on a major commitment of molding future generations academically and socially.” Prior to her assignment at Palm Elementary, Leticia Trevino served as the principal at several of the district’s alternative education high schools.

Teacher of the Year: Christopher Cumiford, History/Social Science Teacher,

Visalia Technical Early College (VTEC) High School, Visalia Unified School District

Mr. Cumiford began his teaching career with Visalia Unified as an instructor at Charter Alternatives Academy, the district’s community day school. He accepted an exceptionally difficult position working with academically challenged, expelled students, ranging from grades 7-12. He developed a system of instruction so supportive and engaging that his students showed the most significant gains in student test scores in the school.

At VTEC since 2010, Mr. Cumiford has shown an incredible ability to challenge high achieving students while motivating the low achievers. One of the ways he accomplishes this is with genuine passion he has about his subject matter. Mr. Cumiford is eager to share the excitement of history to such an extent that his enthusiasm is contagious. VTEC Principal Victoria Porter said, “I would count Mr. Cumiford as one of the most intelligent, creative and inspiring instructors I know.”

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

Chris Cumiford teaches VTEC students in grades 9-12 with classes in Modern World History, United States History, Civics and Economics in a classroom that is best described as a 21st century museum. Music and artifacts from various ages mix with a three-screen projection system. “Fostering student engagement is another core principle of my teaching philosophy,” Mr. Cumiford said. “I accomplish this by providing students with a multi-sensory learning experience that gets them excited to learn. Through the use of multi-media, active field trips, and exposure to unique primary source historical documents, students gain a deeper appreciation for learning as part of engaging hands on experience.”

Students entering his class are immediately engaged and immersed in the curriculum for the duration of the 120-minute block. Mr. Cumiford teaches using a “RECONEXCO” method he developed. RECONEXCO stands for comprehensive research, artistic conceptualize, authentic experience, and innovative contribution. “These steps are designed to activate critical thinking skills, foster an awareness for the interconnectedness of all subjects and develop a deeper appreciation for the past,” he said. Mr. Cumiford divides his class into modules, with half the class working on interdisciplinary projects and the other half divided into cooperative groups that move from module to module every 10 minutes to examine primary documents or view a documentary relating to the curriculum. Then, midway through the block, the students switch. So effective are his innovative practices, that Mr. Cumiford was recruited this year as a presenter for the California Council for the Social Sciences.

Mr. Cumiford is an active participant in the Tulare County’ Office of Education’s showcase of project based learning practices known as “A Night at the 21st Century Museum.” He is also active in National History Day – Tulare County and an adjunct History and Social Science Professor at Fresno Pacific University. Mr. Cumiford was selected as the 2015 Visalia Unified Teacher of the Year.

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

School Employee of the Year: Evelia “Eve” Alvarez, Office Manager/Guidance Associate, Kaweah High School, Exeter Unified School District

Eve Alvarez wears many hats at Kaweah High School, a continuation school in Exeter. Her principal, Darren Pace, said that while her title is Office Manager and Guidance Associate, she goes way beyond her job description to serve as the school’s registrar, counselor, clerk, librarian, activities director, bilingual coordinator, student services director, ELD coordinator, parent liaison, testing coordinator and independent study coordinator for more than 100 students who attend the school. She also teaches a Reconnecting Youth class designed to build social resiliency skills in students.

Ethical and results-oriented, Mrs. Alvarez has risen to the challenge of her position. She has demonstrated an unwavering consideration, capability and commitment to students at Kaweah High School. So committed, Mrs. Alvarez recently completed her Master of Arts degree in Counseling and her Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential so that she could better serve the students. At Kaweah High School, she is the "go-to" person for every student, staff and community member at our site.

According to Mr. Pace, her support and coordination of services has led to Kaweah High School receiving a Golden Bell Award and quickly becoming one of the highest achieving alternative schools in the Valley.

“Working within an environment where students have multiple needs and require disparate interventions provides me the greatest opportunity to stimulate the highest level of growth in academic achievement and personal success,” said Mrs. Alvarez. “I work with extended families, police, probation, mental health, children services, coaches, special education occupational therapy, community service providers and employers on a daily basis. The diverse conditions and challenges associated in working closely with the

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

neediest students are more rewarding than I could have ever envisioned.” Although she could obtain a higher paying job in teaching with her PPS Credential, she said, “I have remained as an office manager because I discovered there is greater compensation than just a paycheck.”

Mrs. Alvarez is constantly meeting with students who otherwise would not have guidance at home. She routinely helps the staff deal with behavior issues and acts as a liaison to parents at home. She is able to effectively direct students and keep them on track throughout their academic school years and beyond. Students who have moved on to Exeter Union High School often come back to Kaweah to seek her advice. Without hesitation, she helps them understand what they are doing and why, and as they leave, both student and parents always praise her for all the support and guidance they received.

FINALISTS

Two finalists are selected in each of the three categories:

Administrator of the Year

Chris Meyer, Principal, Dinuba High School, Dinuba Unified School District

Jill Rojas, Principal, Visalia Adult School, Visalia Unified School District

Teacher of the Year

Christie Coday, Second Grade Teacher, Garden Elementary School, Tulare City School District

Michaelpaul Mendoza, World/U.S. Cultural History Teacher/Activities Director, Mission Oak High School,
Tulare Joint Union High School District

School Employee of the Year

Glori Jones, Special Education Aide, Los Tules Middle School, Tulare City School District

Lorena White, Web Developer, Tulare County Office of Education

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

RECOGNITION EVENT

Award recipients, finalists and nominees will be honored at a recognition breakfast on November 3, 2015.

Event attendees will enjoy a video highlighting the work of the overall winners.

“We greatly appreciate the support of our partners in this event – the Educational Employees Credit Union, its President/CEO Beth Dooley, and board of directors,” says Jim Vidak. “Together, we have the privilege of recognizing the many talented men and women who devote their lives to educating children and young adults in Tulare County.”

For more information, contact Marlene Moreno, Administrative Assistant, at (559) 733-6302.

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