

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

September 17, 2018

For Immediate Release

Contact: Robert Herman
Public Information Officer
559/733-6606
cell: 559/303-8568

Tulare County Office of Education Announces: Educators of the Year to be honored at the 25th Annual Confucius' Birthday Celebration at Chinese Cultural Center September 20, 2018 • 6:00 p.m. • Chinese Cultural Center • 500 S. Akers St., Visalia

In 1994, members of the Central California Chinese Cultural Center approached Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak about creating an event to honor teachers. The board members explained that Chinese people around the world often mark the occasion of Confucius' birthday – China's advocate for universal education – by recognizing exemplary teachers. Since 1994, members of the Chinese Cultural Center have held a dinner celebration at their beautiful facilities in Visalia honoring one elementary, one middle and one high school teacher.

On Thursday, September 20, the invited educators, family, and friends will celebrate three exemplary teachers at the 25th Annual Confucius' Birthday/Educators of the Year Awards. "This year's winners go above and beyond to support the students they serve, taking on many responsibilities outside their regular classroom duties," said Mr. Vidak. "Each of them is a valued resource for their entire school."

The winners of the 2018 Educators of the Year Awards are:

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

Paul Meadors, Fifth-Grade Teacher, Traver Joint School District

Paul Meadors entered the field of teaching 22 years ago, beginning at Traver Elementary School in northwest Tulare County. At Traver, he has taught both third and fifth grades and served as athletic director for the school district for 11 years. He currently coaches football and basketball, oversees the summer school program, and serves as the athletic commissioner for the Central Valley River League sports program, which includes Traver and seven other schools.

Compassionate, hardworking, creative, and loved by students and staff alike, Mr. Meadors is a graduate of Fresno Pacific University, a published author and composer, and the head sports writer for the Clovis Roundup newspaper. District superintendent Steve Ramirez describes Mr. Meadors as the “pied piper” of Traver School. “He shows his students first hand that they should always reach for their dreams,” said Mr. Ramirez. “He constantly demonstrates that anything is possible with hard work and determination.”

Omar Lopez, Math Teacher, Burton Middle School, Burton School District (Porterville)

Omar Lopez has served as a math teacher at Burton Middle School for two years, with an additional 13 years of teaching experience. For five years prior to becoming a teacher, Mr. Lopez worked as a Migrant Education community liaison in Salinas, California. While teaching eighth-grade math, Mr. Lopez finds ways to engage every student in learning, imparting his own love for math. His principal, Adrianna Franco, said, “I have been impressed by Omar's drive and caring demeanor. He is organized, dependable, goal oriented, approachable, innovative, and a lifelong learner who truly cares for students and their success.”

One of the first teachers on campus every morning, Mr. Lopez works long hours after school to coordinate Burton Middle School’s sporting events. Last year, he served as the school’s athletic director, working closely with the coaches and other athletic directors in the area, and organizing an end-of-the-year banquet to

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

celebrate and recognize the teams' accomplishments. Mr. Franco also helps students prepare for the countywide Math Super Bowl competition. This fall, Mr. Lopez will begin a program to obtain his school administrative services credential.

**Zilda Hilliard, English Teacher and English Language Development (ELD) Department Chair,
Mission Oak High School, Tulare Joint Union High School District**

Administrators praised Zilda Hilliard for advocating for Mission Oak High School's English Language Learners (ELL) and for serving as a model for her colleagues. Principal Michelle Borges said, "Zilda has the unique ability to make students from diverse backgrounds feel safe and welcomed while they grow as learners. She loves her students as if they are her own, supporting them with additional academic and social-emotional resources. It is extremely heartwarming to see how quickly she acclimates them to our complicated school system."

This past year, Mrs. Hilliard collaborated with her department to host an indoor soccer tournament exclusive to her ELL students. This bonding experience was such a success that administrators plan to continue the practice annually. Mrs. Hilliard has also served in a number of leadership roles beginning in 1994 as ELD Department Chair. She has been key in developing the Tulare Joint Union High School District's ELL Master Plan and the development of the ELD curriculum. She assists site and district administration with the English Learner Advisory Committee meetings and is a member of the Mission Oak Site Advisory Committee.

A tribute video profiling the three honorees will be shown at the Confucius' Birthday dinner September 20. A copy of the video will be available online at tcoe.org/EOTY on October 1. ***The Confucius Birthday/Educators of the Year Awards event is not open to the public.***