

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

April 13, 2023

## **Media Advisory**

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**Tulare County Office of Education Announces:**

## **Countywide Excellence in Education Winners Announced Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year, and School Employee of the Year selected in annual awards program**

Yesterday afternoon, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire surprised the three winners named in the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Tulare County Excellence in Education Awards program. The three winners notified were Tammy Bradford (Tulare County Administrator/Manager of the Year), Jennifer Powers (Tulare County Teacher of the Year), and Sonya Lopez (Tulare County School Employee of the Year).

Earlier this month, a selection committee of Tulare County business and education leaders met to review the nominees in each of the three categories. A total of 36 nominations were received this year from Tulare County school districts. Each nomination was reviewed and scored individually by every member of the selection committee.

“Each of these individuals is deeply creative – utilizing their resources and partnerships in the community to provide greater opportunities for their students,” Hire said.

### **WINNERS:**

#### **Administrator/Manager of the Year**

#### **TAMMY BRADFORD**

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT SPECIAL SERVICES AND SELPA DIRECTOR

Tulare County Office of Education

Tammy Bradford oversees the Tulare County Office of Education’s Special Services Division, with over 800 full- and part-time employees providing classroom instruction throughout the county and numerous supplemental services. Special Services supports foster and homeless youth, children – ages 0-3 – with developmental delays, students with autism, and those needing vision, hearing, behavior, psychological, social services, and occupational/physical therapy supports. Bradford has been the division’s assistant superintendent for eight years.

Nominators recognize that her empathy for the students in her programs stems from growing up with three siblings with special needs. “From the age of 10, when the oldest of my three siblings

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

was born, I knew that my purpose in life was to make a difference, to dedicate my time and life's work to creating opportunities for those that may otherwise see a barrier in front of them. I was determined to remove that barrier," Bradford said.

One of Bradford's supporters said, "She treats her job as a 24/7 endeavor, always making herself available to superintendents, staff and parents whenever needs arise. From handling mental health crises...to meeting kids at the bus stop to make sure they get to school when they don't want to go, Tammy is a hands-on leader, involving herself in the work that her team does day in and day out, tirelessly working to support her staff and districts in their pursuit of supporting kids."

Nominators also praised her leadership, transparency, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Bradford has used these skills to create new programs, including the Alternative Achievement Program for students with severe behavioral needs, the Dream Center for foster and homeless youth, and the Mental Wellness Triage Grant to place additional social workers in schools throughout the county.

## **Teacher of the Year**

### **JENNIFER POWERS**

FIFTH GRADE TEACHER, HERITAGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tulare City School District

"Jennifer Powers has been one of the hardest-working teachers anyone will ever meet," said a colleague. "I say this with confidence because I truly believe it is physically impossible to do more than what Jennifer does on a weekly basis, year after year, with her own students and so many other students in our school."

Powers is a fifth-grade teacher at Heritage Elementary School in Tulare, where she has worked for 14 years. She teaches math, language arts, science, social studies, and physical education to her students in fun and engaging ways. She leads wagon train simulations, book tastings, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) activities such as building towers, designing bridges, and creating catapults. Her students engage in baking to learn about fractions, manage a monthly student paycheck system, and make instructional videos to keep the learning hands-on.

Powers recognizes that her students come to her class with diverse learning styles and background knowledge, so she continually assesses their understanding and provides differentiated instruction to help each student reach the fifth-grade learning standards.

In addition to her responsibilities as a classroom teacher, she coaches the school's Poetry and Prose participants and Reading Revolution team – two TCOE events that promote literacy. She also directs Heritage's school talent show and its school play.

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

Since 2016, she has been her school's technology lead, assisting teachers in using technology in their instruction and showing them new tech tools that are available. She works as a mentor for new and developing teachers. She is her school's professional development lead for topics including growth mindset, mathematics standards, and writing instruction. At the district level, she is a leader in teaching reading and math progressions.

## **School Employee of the Year**

**SONYA LOPEZ**

TECHNICAL JOB DEVELOPER/WORK-BASED LEARNING COORDINATOR,  
PATHWAYS DEPARTMENT  
Porterville Unified School District

A Porterville native, Sonya Lopez returned to her hometown to “pay it forward” – working to support students in transitioning to college and career as part of the district's Pathways Department. “Looking back at my own educational experience, if it wasn't for my teachers, counselors, and staff that helped me navigate school and motivated me to reach my full potential, I wouldn't have been able to pursue my postsecondary education,” she said. “One of the most rewarding parts of being in the field of education is that I have the ability to encourage and support students to keep moving forward and reach their goals.”

Lopez provides students with work-based learning activities that support college preparation, career exploration, and workforce readiness. She also builds strong partnerships with business professionals and community organizations to increase student work-based learning opportunities. She is the force behind seeking out and placing over 1,500 high school students in internship opportunities.

To do this, she maintains relationships with hundreds of community and industry partners. This includes partners from across the state that she seeks out to engage pathway students in person or on a virtual level. The common thread in seeking partners is how their expertise will benefit youth and help them rise up.

The relationships she promotes aids the PUSD Pathway Department with placing students in the work place. Lopez works closely with the City of Porterville, the Porterville Chamber of Commerce, and many other organizations in the greater Porterville community.

Lopez supports Porterville Unified's various pathway advisory boards. She also helps to coordinate a number of events, including the business partner “meet and greet” for freshmen, mentor conference for sophomores, mock interviews, and senior projects and portfolio reviews.

## **FINALISTS:**

In addition to the winners, the selection committee chose two finalists in each category. The finalists in the 2023 Excellence in Education Awards program are:

# Tulare County Office of Education

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## **Administrator/Manager of the Year**

Manjeet Dail, Director of College and Career, Dinuba Unified School District  
Grant Schimelpfening, Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services, Lindsay Unified School District

## **Teacher of the Year**

Josie Domingcil, Eighth-Grade ELA teacher, Washington Intermediate School, Dinuba Unified School District  
Whitney Marroquin, Second-Grade Teacher, Rocky Hill Elementary School, Exeter Unified School District

## **School Employee of the Year**

Nadia Garcia, Paraprofessional, Creekside Community Day School, Visalia Unified School District  
Anthony Totty, Digital Learning Specialist, Lincoln Elementary School, Lindsay Unified School District

## **RECOGNITION EVENT:**

**29<sup>th</sup> Annual Tulare County Excellence in Education Awards**

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 (by invitation only)**

7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

Visalia Convention Center Exhibit Hall, 303 East Acequia, Visalia, CA

The Excellence in Education program is a partnership between the Tulare County Office of Education and Educational Employees Credit Union (EECU).

# TCOE #