

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

April 25, 2024

## **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**

On Friday, April 19, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire surprised the three winners named in the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Tulare County Excellence in Education Awards program. The three winners notified were Alexa Barba-Tepper (2024 Administrator/Manager of the Year), Kristy Caesar (2024 Teacher of the Year), and Lisa Kruger (2024 School Employee of the Year).

In March, a selection committee of Tulare County business and education leaders met to review the nominees in each of the three categories. A total of 30 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, finalists, and nominees are all phenomenal educators, creatively addressing the needs of their students and the communities they serve,” Hire said.

### **ADMINISTRATOR/MANAGER OF THE YEAR**

#### **Winner**

#### **Alexa Barba-Tepper**

Assistant Principal, Redwood High School  
Visalia Unified School District

A woman who wears many hats, Alexa Barba-Tepper has served the students of Redwood High School since 2007, first as a school counselor and – since 2011 – as the assistant principal of Student Services. Under her leadership, she has built a comprehensive counseling department with systems to increase student A-G course achievement and college and career readiness. She also oversees the special education department and assists with student government activities and the Link Crew Program. On many instances, she has connected marginalized students to a club or activity, increasing their engagement on campus.

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Barba-Tepper plans many school events, including Round-Up for upperclassmen, freshman orientation, eighth grade visits, the end of year assembly, and Redwood's graduation ceremony. Through these activities and others, she serves as the custodian of the school's cherished traditions. In giving back to her profession, Barba-Tepper is a coach for administrative services credential candidates through the Tulare County office of Education iLead Program, Fresno Pacific University, and her district's Clear Administrative Services Credential program.

## **Finalists**

Evan Halstead  
Counselor, Dinuba High School  
Dinuba Unified School District

Shanelle Herrera  
Assistant Principal, Tulare Union High School  
Tulare Joint Union High School District

## **TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

### **Winner**

**Kristy Caesar**  
Transitional Kindergarten Learning Facilitator, Lincoln Elementary School  
Lindsay Unified School District

Kristy Caesar is a transitional kindergarten learning facilitator at Lincoln Elementary School in Lindsay. Her nominators called her, "a model of boundless energy and passion for teaching, leading, and learning." Caesar has worked for Lindsay Unified since 2012, previously serving the district as a literacy coach, reading specialist, after school literacy learning facilitator for the Migrant Education program, and a kindergarten learning facilitator. In her classroom, Caesar creates unique experiences to ignite children's imaginations – a real tractor to learn about agriculture or a homemade yellow submarine to transport learners to the depths of the oceans.

Caesar is a board member for the Dollars for Scholars not-for-profit program, which provides scholarships to Lindsay students. She also serves as a mentor teacher for both the district's Teacher Residency Program and the Lindsay Pipeline – coaching, training, developing, and mentoring the next generation of educators. She has participated in the Tulare County Office of Education Community of Practice for Transitional Kindergarten and the Universal PreKindergarten Work Group. School psychologist Barry Sommer said, "Everyone who knows early education knows and wants Kristy."

### **Finalists**

**Tarek Elsharkawy**  
Chemistry Teacher, Golden West High School  
Visalia Unified School District

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## **Mary Pauls**

Music Teacher

Monson-Sultana Joint Union School District

## **SCHOOL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR**

### **Winner**

#### **Lisa Kruger**

Administrative Assistant, Linwood Elementary School

Visalia Unified School District

Lisa Kruger has served Linwood Elementary School as an employee for 18 years and even longer as a parent volunteer. As the school's administrative assistant, she is the "first to step up when any staff member or student needs support," said Principal Mike Yates. Kruger organizes school assemblies for students and their parents, intramural sports programs at lunchtime, and Linwood's "Giving Tree" donations program for families in need.

In addition to her duties as the principal's assistant, she has developed or assumed responsibility for numerous special programs. As an artist, Kruger volunteered 21 years ago to teach art and art history in the school's new after school program. That program continues today and includes an annual Art Show to showcase student artwork. Kruger also coaches teams for Odyssey of the Mind – an international creative competition – for 15 years at Linwood Elementary, La Joya Middle School, and El Diamante High School. Her teams have competed at Odyssey of the Mind World Finals for six years, placing fourth one year and in the top 20 all other years.

### **Finalists**

#### **Rita Leon**

Special Student Services Administrative Assistant

Dinuba Unified School District

#### **Gene Mendes**

Character Education Facilitator

Tulare County Office of Education

## **RECOGNITION EVENT:**

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

**Wednesday, October 30, 2024 (by invitation only)**

7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

Tulare County Office of Education, Jim Vidak Education Center, 6200 S. Mooney Blvd.,

Visalia, CA

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

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