

Tulare County Office of Education celebrates the service of 25 staff members who retired this year

Each year following the June meeting of the Tulare County Board of Education, the Human Resources Division honors employees who retired during the current school year. While the reception has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, John Rodriguez, director of Human Resources, was able to collect the following quotes from each retiree's supervisor to share with readers this week.

“We want to thank the following men and women who dedicated a combined 481 years of service to the students of Tulare County,” said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. “The common qualities that shine through these descriptions are dedication, skill, and care and compassion. We wish each of you a happy and healthy retirement spent enjoying the people and things you love most!”

SHARON ADAMS

**Teacher, Special Services – Mild to Moderate Program
20 years of service**



Supervisor Jennifer Reimer says, “Sharon made an immeasurable impact on the students with whom she has worked. Her most recent assignment had her serving as the RSP teacher at Sequoia Union, where she was honored with a school-wide “Mrs. Adams Day” for her work with students in both the special education and general education settings. She is the kind of teacher who holds students to high expectations and takes delight in seeing them achieve more than they thought they ever could. Students knew that Mrs. Adams loved them and, as a result, responded to her instruction with enthusiasm and ease.”

JOYCE AKMAN

Instructional Assistant, Special Services – AcCEL Program

20 years of service

Supervisor Carrie Stephens says, “Joyce Akman was hired as an instructional assistant for TCOE in January 1999, supporting students with the most significant needs. Joyce left a lasting impact on the program. She was not just a solid, reliable person for students to count on, but other staff as well. Her kindness and willingness to help others was her trademark. We congratulate Joyce and wish her well on her future endeavors!”

SADHANA AWASHTI

Teacher, Special Services – AcCEL Program

19 years of service



Supervisor Jill Santivanez says, “Sadhana Awashti has worked with TCOE AcCEL since August 2000. During these years, she created an organized classroom full of visual supports and imaginative tasks. Teacher Sadhana is known for her systematic planning ability and her instructional preparation. She is a steady, quiet force always ready to get the job done.”

JEANNETTA BELVIN

**Special Needs Assistant, Special Services –
AcCEL Program**

21 years of service

Supervisor Rebecca Hendrickson says, “Jeannetta Belvin has been an instructional assistant for the Tulare AcCEL Program since 1998. Jeannetta spent her years at Maple Learning Complex working with students with severe cognitive disabilities and adaptive deficits. She was a very dedicated paraprofessional with a heart for students. There was a time when she was accidentally locked out of the building. Despite her small stature and without



hesitation, she climbed the fence to get back to work. She would take on any challenge and face it head on. She could often put a smile on your face with her dry sense of humor. Jeannetta will be truly missed!

SANDRA CAMPO

Instructional Assistant, Special Services – AcCEL Program

21 years of service

Supervisor Carrie Stephens says, “Sandra Campo found her niche in the AcCEL program as an instructional assistant working with adult students with special needs. Her kind demeanor and sense of humor were a perfect match for our grownup students. She found the best balance of providing support but encouraging independence and fostering student’s abilities to help develop their skills. Sandra will be greatly missed and we wish her only the best.”

DONNA CARGILL

School Secretary, Special Services – AcCEL Program

33 years of service

Supervisor Carrie Stephens says, “Donna began her career with TCOE in 1986. She served several programs as a school secretary, but spent the majority of her time supporting AcCEL, or severely handicapped programs as it was formerly known. To put it simply, Donna is the heart of the program. She has touched many lives with her kindness and compassion. She has consistently demonstrated grace under extreme circumstances and found ways to keep the program not just running, but thriving. Donna’s impact will be lasting. We are so grateful for her many years of service.”

HILDA CASTELLANO

School Secretary, Special Services – AcCEL Program

15 years of service

Supervisor Carrie Stephens says, “Hilda came to TCOE in 2005. She was hired as a program secretary for the AcCEL Program. She quickly settled into the chaos of a busy special education center for the largest program in Tulare County. She has been the kind voice on the phone no matter the circumstances. If she was ever frustrated or out of patience, she never showed it. She has been a consummate professional with exacting skills in countless areas. It cannot be understated how much Hilda will be missed.”

ANNE CLIFFORD

Teacher, Special Services – AcCEL Program

25 years of service



Supervisor Rebecca Hendrickson says, “Anne has taught in the Tulare County Office of Education AcCEL Program since 1995 as a Community Based Instruction teacher for adult students with moderate-to-severe disabilities. Anne’s love for her students and the commitment to their success has been truly inspiring. It has been evident over the past 25 years that teaching special education has been Anne’s calling and passion. If anyone knows Anne in any capacity, they are well aware that her energy level and enthusiasm is larger than life! And she’s going to need all of that vigor to take care of her adorable new grandbaby during her retirement. Anne’s contributions in education will light the path for future generations of teachers!”

VIRGINIA GARZA

Teacher Assistant, Early Childhood Education Program

20 years of service

Supervisor Nancy Magana says, “I have known Virginia for the past 20 years. Virginia and I worked together for 11 years at the Cutler #1 Child Development Center. In 2011, I became her supervisor and continued to be impressed with her professionalism in serving our children and families. Virginia, or Virgie as we called her, was one of the most dedicated employees we had in our program. She always ensured everything was completed and ready before we received our children in the morning. Virgie was excellent at everything she did and we truly miss her.”

SANDRA GOERZEN

Instructional Assistant, Special Services – AcCEL Program

28 years of service

Supervisor Cathy Machado says, “Sandra worked for Tulare County Office of Education as an instructional assistant in the AcCEL Program. During her years with TCOE, she worked with many different age groups. Her favorite age group was high school students. Ms. Goerzen worked her last three years as an instructional assistant in the TCOE satellite classroom at Summit Collegiate Academy in the Burton School District in Porterville.”

KATHY HASKILL

Instructional Assistant, Bright Start Parent/Infant Program

19 years of service

Supervisor Ron Pekarek says, “Kathy Haskill dedicated years as an instructional assistant at the Bright Start Program and her entire career to serving the children and families of Tulare County. Her clients and coworkers loved working with her and she will be sorely missed as she retires. Kathy always brought a great attitude and bright smile to the homes of her clients. Always a team player, she was not afraid to dress up for workshops, fair day and the like – all to bring joy to the children and families she served. Congratulations, Kathy!”

YOLANDA HERRERA

Teacher Assistant, Early Childhood Education Program

21 years of service

Supervisor Josefa Martin says, “Yolanda Herrera served as a teacher assistant at the Snowden Child Development Center in Farmersville. While small in size, Yolanda was outspoken, funny, and happy. Children loved to measure themselves against teacher Yoli, telling her, ‘Look teacher, I’m almost as big as you!’ Yolanda was a pleasure to work with!”

ELAINE HOFF

Counselor, University Preparatory High School

5 years of service

Supervisor Eric Thiessen says, “Elaine has been an instrumental part of our staff in her efforts and successes with our students who were on an IEP or 504 Plan. Not only did she go above and beyond with her group of students, she also took the time to work with other students who

struggled academically. Elaine has a caring heart for all students, which will be greatly missed. She was a leader and an advocate for students who needed a little extra TLC.”

GEORGIA JOHNSON

**Licensed Vocational Nurse, Special Services –
AcCEL Program**

19 years of service

Supervisor Sarah Hamilton says, “Georgia is a skilled LVN who came to the school setting with a background in both the ER and as a Navy corpsman. She will be missed for many reasons, including her ability to connect with staff, students, and parents. She was a fixture at the LB Hill Learning Center and it will not be the same without her. We will miss her terribly, but know that she will enjoy her retirement and time with family.”



DIANA JONES

Instructional Assistant, Special Services – AcCEL Program

8 years of service

Supervisor Carrie Stephens says, “Diana served as an instructional assistant for AcCEL since 2012. She worked primarily with high school-age students with special needs. She demonstrated great compassion and took pride in her work. She was a valued member of her classroom staff and will be greatly missed.”

ODILIA LINARES

School Secretary, Special Services – AcCEL Program

34 years of service

Supervisor Rebecca Hendrickson says, “Odilia worked for Tulare County Office of Education since 1986. For the past 34 years, she has served as program secretary for the AcCEL Program beginning at the Yettem Learning Center, then at Occupational Training Program in Visalia, and finally at Maple Learning Complex in Tulare. You see Odilia’s heart as you watch her greet students entering Maple Learning Complex and the smiles her voice elicits. Parents are comforted to know that she’s on the other end of the line when they call with a question or concern. Odilia will leave some big shoes to fill! But, we know that she’s going to enjoy this next chapter in life as she devotes her time to her five beautiful grandchildren.”

CATHY MACHADO

Program Manager, Special Services – AcCEL Program

5 years of service

Supervisor Sarah Hamilton says, “Cathy always put students first. Likewise, her staff felt supported and could come to her with any problems. Cathy always made herself available to staff, parents, and especially the students. And she made work fun. It was always interesting to see what she would be for Halloween. It ranged from Queen of Hearts to an inflatable T-Rex, which the students loved. She had such a great sense of humor. Cathy will be extremely missed by parents, students, staff, and the program as a whole. She is a great administrator and an even better person. Enjoy retirement Cathy – it’s well deserved!”

ADELIA MARTINEZ**Planning & Support Manager, Early Childhood Education Program****32 years of service**

Supervisor Alex Elliott says, “Adelia began her career at Tulare County Office of Education Early Childhood Education program in 1988. She has dedicated nearly 32 years of her life to ECE, witnessing so many changes and accomplishments that she is known as the program’s historian! Adelia is also known as a very giving person who willingly puts aside whatever she is working on to help out or research the answer to a question. Adelia’s cheerful laugh and fun-loving personality have been a consistent presence in our office. While she is outstanding at organizing many events, her true love is the ECE Program and its mission in serving the families of Tulare County.”

**CELESTINA MARTINEZ****Teacher, Early Childhood Education Program****26 years of service**

Supervisor Nancy Magana says, “I met Celestina when she joined our Dinuba Child Development Center in July 2018. Celestina became one of my Lead Teachers at the center. She embraced her new work family and often she let us know she was happy to be at our center, and felt very welcomed by all of our staff. I had the opportunity to see her work with her children every day and see that they were welcomed every morning with a hug or a high five. I knew our children were coming to a loving classroom. Celestina will be missed.”

CRISTINA McCULLOCH**Records Clerk, Early Childhood Education Program****5 years of service**

Supervisor Sylvia Avila says, “When you would walk into the office at Cutler #2 Child Development Center, you were always greeted with a genuine smile and a heartfelt, ‘Hello.’ Cristina was cheerful and her personality was contagious; no one ever left without an uplifting word. She helped all the staff, parents, and children with whatever they needed. She was always lending a hand. Cristina was a positive person and a wonderful asset to our staff. She will be greatly missed.”

**LORI POSEY****Teacher, Special Services – AcCEL Program****8 years of service**

Supervisor Cathy Machado says, “Lori Posey worked as a Special Education teacher in the Porterville AcCEL Program. She taught both preschool and elementary. Lori’s students enjoyed being in her class. She worked well with students, parents, and staff. Mrs. Posey spent her last three years at Olive Elementary in the 4-6 grade AcCEL satellite classroom.”

KAREN RICHERT**Teacher, Special Services – Mild/Moderate Program**

4 years of service

Supervisor Jennifer Reimer says, “Karen is re-retiring from her role as an RSP teacher with TCOE after impacting hundreds of lives over the years. She actually retired once already, but decided to come back to the classroom in order to continue the career that she has loved so much. Karen puts in long hours and always goes the extra mile to ensure that her students receive the best service they possibly can. Her devotion to her students and her desire to see them succeed are second-to-none. She was always thrilled when they achieved academic or behavioral milestones. She will now have time to pursue adventures on the open road, and although we’ll miss her, we’re so very happy for her!”

DONNA RODRIGUEZ

Instructional Assistant, Special Services – AcCEL Program

19 years of service

Supervisor Carrie Stephens says, “Donna Rodriguez was hired as an instructional assistant with TCOE in August 2000. She supported students with special needs at many, many grade levels. Toward the end of her career, she found herself working with adult students. Donna had great passion for this age group and enjoyed the students immensely. Donna went above and beyond to get to know each student and to enhance their educational experiences. We are grateful for her dedication and wish Donna the best!”

VERA GALE SPANO

Kitchen Supervisor, Early Childhood Education Program

21 years of service

Supervisor Rosalie Velasco says, “As a kitchen supervisor at North Visalia Child Development Center, Gale learned a great deal about cooking large amounts of food and maintaining an orderly kitchen. She did a great job of fulfilling the lead role with staff and subs. Gale loved organizing and decorating for special events and occasions, and made everyone feel very special. Gale has a big heart and was always looking out for and helping others. Gale, you gave ECEP over 20 years and we want to thank you for that. We will miss you dearly and wish you a very happy retirement. Enjoy your growing family and have lots of fun!”



ALFORD WILEY

Teacher, Court/Community Schools

33 years of service

Supervisor Nicole Rocha says, “Al was a teacher in our Court/Community schools for 33 years, working with young people who had been adjudicated and removed from their home high schools. He had a special way of connecting with each student, helping them to understand that the mistakes of their past didn’t have to define their future. He worked diligently to help each one get back on track academically to return to their high school. He was a mentor to fellow teachers, kind and professional, and a great asset to our program! We wish him all the best in his retirement.”



KSEE24 to hold special to honor students profiled through *Your Character Matters* program



On Thursday evening, June 18, Central Valley viewers will have an opportunity to meet the wonderful students profiled in 17 *Your Character Matters* stories this year. The stories, featured weekly on *KSEE24 News*, are heartwarming accounts of students of all ages from throughout the county displaying good character at school and in their communities.

For the past five school years, the Tulare County Office of Education CHARACTER COUNTS! Program has partnered with KSEE24 to produce weekly stories beginning in November each year. While school closures suspended filming of the stories in March, the partnership has produced more than 100 segments in five years. Kelley Petty, Tulare County CHARACTER COUNTS! coordinator, works with the station's reporters and the schools who nominate their students to develop the stories. "We appreciate so much the Tulare County teachers who are incorporating character education in their classroom every day," she said. "It's an honor to share the evidence of their efforts with viewers."

"In the nation, we know of no other programs like *Your Character Matters*," said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. "It reflects our commitment to provide and advocate for character education in our schools. We support it because we believe that an investment in student character is an investment in the future of our communities."

To watch the *Your Character Matters* recognition special, tune in to **KSEE24 on Thursday, June 18 at 7:00 p.m.** All 17 videos will be available at tcoe.org/YourCharacterMatters following the special.

Distance Learning Resources

- [Arts All Around Us](#)
- [TCOE Learning at Home](#)

Coming Up!

- Many upcoming student events have been cancelled or postponed. Check the current list of all student events (cancelled, postponed, and tentatively scheduled) on the [Student Events](#) webpage.

View more events at tcoe.org/CalendarofEvents.

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To receive *News Gallery Week*, visit tcoe.org/GetTheGallery, or contact Jennifer Fisher at jenniferf@tcoe.org or (559) 733-6172.
