

Tulare County
Office of Education

Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools

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Countywide Excellence in Education winners announced with educators in Dinuba and Porterville taking the top honors

On Monday, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire surprised the three winners named in the 32nd Annual Tulare County Excellence in Education Awards program. The three winners notified were Josefina Velazquez (2026 Administrator/Manager of the Year), Michael Bedoya (2026 Teacher of the Year), and Placido Flores (2026 School Employee of the Year).

A few weeks ago, a selection committee of Tulare County business and education leaders reviewed the nominees in each of the three categories. A total of 49 nominations were received from Tulare County school districts. Each nomination was scored individually by the selection committee.

“This year’s winners are exceptional individuals committed to building classroom and campus cultures with energy, belonging, and success,” Hire said. “It’s a pleasure to celebrate them, along with the finalists and nominees, who represent Tulare County education so well.”

The following winners and finalists, along with all nominees, will be honored at a breakfast event on November 3. The event is co-hosted by Educational Employees Credit Union.

ADMINISTRATOR/MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Winner

Josefina Velazquez

Principal, Kennedy
Elementary School
Dinuba Unified School
District



In two short years, Principal Josefina Velazquez of Kennedy Elementary School has reshaped the school culture, improved outcomes for students

that need extra support, and reengaged families. Stepping into the role during a difficult period for the school, she quickly restored trust, rebuilt structures, and established a clear, student-centered vision for long-term success.

A hallmark of her leadership is her mastery of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). She leads Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) across all tiers, implements robust data-tracking systems, and ensures timely, proactive interventions. Her work has led to measurable reductions in discipline referrals and stronger communication between behavior support teams and teachers.

Velazquez's leadership extends beyond systems to people. She is deeply committed to staff morale, professional growth, and shared purpose – all to create a positive staff culture. Teacher Alyssa Alvarado wrote, "Her actions consistently reflect her values... she is the steady and reliable presence our school needed."

Family and community partnerships are another defining strength. She has expanded parent engagement to monthly events, increased attendance, and fostered a welcoming, inclusive climate through celebrations, workshops, and community-building traditions. Her leadership has also broadened after-school opportunities, including music and dance.

Velazquez's personal journey profoundly shapes her leadership. Raised in poverty and instability, and later a teen mother, she describes school as her "safe haven" and the place where adults "believed in me even when I doubted myself." This experience fuels her belief in high expectations, restorative practices, and the potential within every child.

Finalists

Vivian Hamilton

Chief Business Officer

Tulare Joint Union High School District

Ken Spencer

Assistant Principal: College and Career, Lindsay High School

Lindsay Unified School District

TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Winner

Michael Bedoya

Seventh- and Eighth-

Grade Teacher,

Washington

Intermediate School

Dinuba Unified School

District

Michael Bedoya is an exceptional educator whose influence extends far beyond academic instruction to shape the

culture, identity, and heart of Washington Intermediate School. As a social science and broadcasting teacher, campus leader, and mentor, Bedoya exemplifies what it means to educate the whole child while fostering belonging, character, and pride within the school community.

Guided by his lifelong philosophy, “Always do your best,” Bedoya emphasizes effort, integrity, and growth over perfection. His engaging, project-based instruction challenges students while providing structured support, allowing them to build critical skills such as collaboration, organization, public speaking, and self-reflection. Mistakes are treated as opportunities for learning, reinforcing resilience, and a growth mindset.

Beyond the classroom, Bedoya is a driving force behind school culture. As the leader of T-Bird TV, the weekly student-produced broadcast, he empowers students to be campus leaders while amplifying messages of kindness, respect, responsibility, attendance, and academic focus. The program unites the campus around shared values and celebrates students and staff in meaningful ways. Bedoya also serves as the emcee for assemblies, rallies, and promotion ceremonies, igniting school spirit, creating joyful moments, and strengthening collective identity.



Bedoya's impact is reinforced through his deep collaboration with colleagues, mentorship of students, and advocacy for campus-wide initiatives. A Dinuba native, he extends his service beyond school through coaching, mentorship, and his family's foundation, supporting students' pathways to higher education.

Respected by staff and adored by students, Bedoya leads with integrity, creativity, and heart.

Finalists

Roxana Flores

Eighth-Grade Mathematics and Science Teacher
Woodville Union School District

Jordan Lapadula

English Teacher, ASB Director, and Coach, Tulare Union High School
Tulare Joint Union High School District

SCHOOL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Winner

Placido Flores

Academy Assistant/Job Developer, Porterville High School
Porterville Unified School District

Placido Flores exemplifies the heart of service, mentorship, and dedication. For more than 22 years, Flores — known affectionately

across campus as “Mr. Placido” — has been a constant, positive presence at Porterville High School and a cornerstone of the Partnership Academy of Business and Finance (PAB). As manager of the Live Oak Café, PHS Student Store, and PAB Court, he provides students with hands-on learning experiences that build confidence, professionalism, and life skills.



Flores' impact is felt throughout the day as he opens the student store before the school day begins and provides students encouragement as they leave for the day. His calm demeanor, patience, and genuine care make him a “go-to” for support, especially when helping motivate at-risk students to stay engaged and succeed.

Through the student store, Flores trains students in far more than retail skills. He teaches responsibility, teamwork, communication, money management, ethical business practices, and essential workplace soft skills that employers value most. Former students consistently credit their success in the workforce to lessons learned under his guidance. His leadership has helped expand opportunities across campus, including operating two store locations and supporting other programs and clubs with financial training.

He also collaborates seamlessly with teachers, administrators, counselors, advisory board members, and business partners, always promoting teamwork. Known as a tireless cheerleader for others, he models the joy in service each day.

As Flores shares, education is not just his job — it is his purpose. His unwavering commitment, heartfelt relationships, and behind-the-scenes work have transformed countless student lives.

Finalists

Florencio Guerra, Jr.

Community School's Coordinator, Washington Elementary School
Lindsay Unified School District

Maria Elena Lopez

Bus Driver, Facility Maintenance, and Instructional Support
Monson-Sultana Joint Union School District

Hundreds of students participate in 53rd Math Super Bowl

More than 140 teams of seventh- and eighth-grade students from 44 schools participated in the 53rd annual Math Super Bowl yesterday, April 14. Six-hundred and 80 students competed in three events – working independently (Power Bowl), in teams with their classmates (Team Bowl), and with students from other schools (Pro Bowl).



In the Pro Bowl competition, the top-scoring, seventh-grade team included Dariel Medina Gutierrez (La Joya Middle School, Visalia), Aubrey Christenson (Ridgeview Middle School, Visalia), June Holly (St. Paul's School, Visalia), Luis Dorado (Summit Charter Intermediate Academy, Porterville), and Alejandro Alvarez (Woodville Union School).

The top-scoring, eighth-grade team included Guadalupe Baez (Carl F. Smith Middle School, Terra Bella), Khang Nguyen (Green Acres Middle School, Visalia), Addison Cooper (La Joya Middle School, Visalia), Tarin Alaniz-Mederos (Live Oak Middle School, Tulare), and Joey Russell (Alice G. Mulcahy Middle School, Tulare)

In the Team Bowl competition, the top-scoring, seventh-grade team was Oak Grove School-A (Visalia). Additional teams receiving blue ribbons for Superior were Carl F. Smith Middle School-A, Liberty Elementary School-A (Tulare), Live Oak Middle School-B, Oak Grove School-B, Ridgeview Middle School-A, St. Paul's School-B, Sequoia Middle School-B, Sundale School-B (Tulare), and Woodlake Valley Middle School-A.

George McCann School-A (Visalia) and Oak Grove School-A were the top-scoring, eighth-grade Team Bowl teams. Other teams receiving blue ribbons for Superior were Liberty Elementary School-A, Liberty Elementary School-B, Monson-Sultana School-B, Ridgeview Middle School-A, St. Aloysius School-B (Tulare), and Valley Life Charter-A (Tulare).

Individually, Jacob Parea of Ridgeview Middle School (Large School) and Chloe Hii of Oak Grove School (Small School) were the overall seventh-grade Power Bowl winners. For eighth grade, Daniil Steblenko of Green Acres Middle School (Large School) and Ethan Niehus of Oak Grove School (Small School) were the top finishers in eighth-grade Power Bowl competition.

For a complete list of results, visit <http://tcoe.org/MathSuperBowl/Results>.

Photo above:

~ Top performing students received ribbons, medals, and plaques for their accomplishments at the 53rd annual Math Super Bowl on April 14.

CHOICES Program partners with Visalia Unified to reduce chronic absenteeism



A yearlong partnership between TCOE's CHOICES Program and Visalia Unified School District (VUSD) came with a sweet reward for students at Conyer Elementary last week. On Friday, the school was awarded an ice cream party for coming out on top of an attendance challenge.

To win an ice cream party, CHOICES challenged every elementary school in the Visalia Unified School District to attempt a "perfect day of attendance" on March 17. The challenge is one strategy employed by an initiative designed to increase student attendance, developed as part of the Learning Communities for School Success / Proposition 47 Consortium (LCSSP) between VUSD and the CHOICES Program.

Funded through a grant from the California Department of Education, the Consortium's focus has been on reducing chronic absenteeism and increasing family and community engagement. Using the theme of "Your Presence is Your Power," activities associated with the LCSSP have included providing families and students with information about the effect of chronic absenteeism through a postcard campaign, holding "Resilience Rallies"(interactive student assemblies at VUSD elementary schools), and setting up informational booths at family engagement events.

Conyer Elementary, which averages a daily attendance rate of 92.99%, recorded 97.94% on the day of the competition, seeing a jump of nearly 5%.

This competition, celebration, and past events hosted through LCSSP have continued to add to the conversations about attendance throughout the district.

Editor: [Robert Herman](#), Communications Director

Contributors: Nayirah Dosu, Jennifer Fisher, Jaime Burnitzki, Paula Terrill, Juliana Davidian, Ryan Ginsberg

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