

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

March 11, 2025

## **Media Advisory**

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## **TCOE announces Educators of the Year in partnership with the Central California Chinese Cultural Center Elementary Educator of the Year, Middle School Educator of the Year, and High School Educator of the Year**

This morning, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire and Wendy Jay, a member of the Chinese Cultural Center’s Board of Directors, visited the third and final honoree in the annual Educators of the Year program. Two other Educators of the Year were notified on Friday.

Since 1994, the Central California Chinese Cultural Center has partnered with the Tulare County Office of Education to honor one elementary, one middle school, and one high school teacher as part of the Confucius’ Birthday/Educators of the Year Awards. Chinese people around the world often mark the occasion of Confucius’ birthday in late September by recognizing exemplary teachers. Each year, members of the Chinese Cultural Center hold a dinner celebration at their center in Visalia for the honorees, their colleagues, and family members.

“Each year, it’s a delight to visit classrooms and surprise three teachers with the news that they have been selected as Educators of the Year,” said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. “This year was no exception. These three educators are exceptional teachers who empower their students to grow and are instructional leaders on their campuses.”

The winners of the 2025 Educators of the Year Awards are:

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

Page 2

## **Elementary Educator of the Year**

**Alicia Bovetti, Third-Grade Teacher**

**Rocky Hill Elementary School, Exeter**

Alicia Bovetti has spent the past 11 years as a teacher at Rocky Hill Elementary in Exeter. She is currently the grade level lead for third-grade. Rocky Hill principal Beth Micari says she has created a system for the third grade where her team meets every Wednesday to collaborate and create an inclusive learning environment. The team shares all of the third-grade students, even splitting up the teaching responsibilities and rotating the students in order to support each other and better serve their needs. This system encourages students' growth and has lessened the need for interventions. Micari describes Bovetti's dedication to mentoring other teachers as unsurpassed. Her classroom is always open to any teacher who may be struggling. She not only welcomes them to observe and learn new skills in her classroom. She follows up to make sure that she can assist them in their classroom as well.

Her passion for nurturing young minds and fostering a love for learning is truly inspiring. Bovetti's involvement in extra activities has built strong relationships with her students, families, and the community. Annually, she organizes student helpers, bounce houses, popcorn, and much more for the school's Halloween festivities. She also fundraises and organizes the third-grade field trip. A couple of days each week, Bovetti can be found tutoring students after school. She is often in attendance at sporting events and birthday parties for her students. She is an invaluable asset to her school and community.

## **Middle School Educator of the Year**

**Carmen Diaz, Eighth-Grade Teacher**

**Alpaugh School, Alpaugh**

Carmen Diaz has dedicated herself to the students and families of Alpaugh Unified School District as an eighth-grade teacher for the past eight years. Previously, she served as the district librarian, where she expanded her love of literature which allowed her to bring stories to life for her students. Alpaugh superintendent Troy Hayes says her classroom is a hub of active learning and meaningful engagement. Diaz

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

Page 3

uses Socratic seminar as her instructional model, which fosters critical thinking and values student perspectives. She facilitates Socratic discussions in every subject, which allows students to come together in small groups and discuss what they have learned. Her ability to connect with and motivate her students ensures that they leave her classroom not only more knowledgeable but also more confident in their abilities.

A lifelong resident of Alpaugh, Diaz's commitment to her community is unparalleled. As a previous student at Alpaugh and the district's only teacher who lives in Alpaugh, all of the students know her from the community. Her ability to build relationships with students, parents, and colleagues creates an inclusive and supportive environment that drives success both in and out of the classroom. She is an active leader in the Alpaugh school community, hosting the eighth-grade graduation ceremony and coaching middle school girls' basketball and volleyball. Her positive impact extends far beyond the classroom walls.

## **High School Educator of the Year**

**Ricardo Florez, Intervention Resource Classroom Teacher**

**Tulare Union High School, Tulare**

Ricardo Florez has been the Intervention Resource Classroom (IRC) program lead at Tulare Union High School for the past four years. Prior to starting the IRC at Tulare Union, he was the IRC lead at Mission Oak High School in Tulare. His administrator, Roger Robles, praises Florez for his initiative in establishing the program at both high schools. In the early stages of the program at Mission Oak, he asked administrators to send all students who were sent to the office for intervention to be sent to his classroom instead. Soon students began to seek out Florez whenever they needed someone to talk to. Through his mentorship, one of the behavior specialists who assisted him at Mission Oak now leads the team at that site.

At Tulare Union, Florez leads a team that includes two full-time behavior specialists. His classroom is not like traditional classrooms. Instead, you will find couches and beanbags, which help create a welcoming and safe place for students. His principal, Michelle Nunley, Ed.D., says his classroom is a room where students can de-escalate, talk with an adult, get instructional help, or have quiet space. He walks students to class, has lunch with them, talks to them during breaks, and even plays games with students at lunch in a

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

Page 4

shirt and a tie. Because he supports not just at-risk students, but all students on campus, Florez has become a trusted and respected teacher, mentor, and colleague.

## **Awards Event**

A dinner celebrating the 2025 Educators of the Year will be held at the Central California Chinese Cultural Center in September. For a list of past honorees, visit [www.tcoe.org/EOTY](http://www.tcoe.org/EOTY).

#TCOE#