



Salute to Teachers



Congratulations to the 2023-24

San Diego County

**Teachers
of the Year**

and all the district nominees



Christina Bass

Painted Rock Elementary
Poway Unified School District

Courtney Coffin
Orange Glen High School
Escondido Union High School District



Amanda Ford

Flying Hills School of the Arts
Cajon Valley Union School District

Wendy Threatt
Felicitia Elementary School
Escondido Union School District



Melanie Villanueva

District Office
(formerly at Hilltop Middle School)
Sweetwater Union High School District

“Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers,” brought to you by San Diego County Credit Union, in partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education and Cox Communications.

SaluteToTeachersSD.com



Salute to Teachers



A Community Says “THANK YOU”

For 33 years, Cox Communications and the San Diego County Office of Education have teamed up for “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” as a way to showcase the region’s 23,000 public school teachers and give the community a way to say, “Thank you, teachers!”

On Friday, Aug. 25, a special reception and show were held in downtown San Diego for the 44 San Diego County Teacher of the Year nominees. At the end of the night, five local educators were announced as the 2023-24 San Diego County Teachers of the Year. “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” brought to you by San Diego County Credit Union featured heartwarming moments from the local education community, and shined the spotlight on San Diego County’s public school teachers.

Since the inception of “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” in 1991, more than 1,000 teachers have been nominated, 140 teachers were named a County Teacher of the Year, 16 became California Teacher of the Year, and one was honored as National Teacher of the Year (Sandy McBrayer received the honor in 1994 for her work in establishing a school for homeless youth in downtown San Diego, known today as the Monarch School).

Additionally, three San Diego County teachers went on to be named one of the four finalists for National Teacher of the Year:

2005: Stan Murphy from San Diego High School in the San Diego Unified School District

2009: “Rappin’ Mathematician” Alex Kajitani from Mission Middle School in the Escondido Union School District

2017: Special education teacher Megan Gross from Del Norte High School in the Poway School District

2022-23 TEACHERS OF THE YEAR MEMORABLE MOMENTS



From left, 2022-23 San Diego County Teachers of the Year Aimee McCoy, Stephanie Cluxton, Juanita Nuñez, and Melissa Rains.

“Throughout my time as teacher of the year, there were many memorable moments that stood out to me. First, being able to bring my dad along with me to these once in-a-lifetime experiences meant the world to me. And for me, out of all of the events, throwing the first pitch at the Padres game with my family and friends watching is truly a moment that will stay with me forever.”

– **Aimee McCoy**

Mesa Verde Middle School, Poway Unified School District

“In the past year, I’ve experienced countless moments of gratitude and joy. One of my fondest memories was walking in the Holiday Bowl Parade and being humbled as the crowd went wild for teachers! The community pride for educators was tangible as pom poms waved and families cheered! It was a collective thank you to the remarkable teachers across our county.”

– **Stephanie Cluxton**

Torrey Hills School, Del Mar Union School District

“Throwing the first pitch at a Padres baseball game and walking into SDSU’s Snapdragon Stadium as a proud representative of San Ysidro School District was so validating. I felt like my students when experiencing and learning something new and exciting. I am grateful to God, my coworkers, family, and friends for all their love and support along my TOY journey. It’s been a wild and exhilarating ride and amazing to represent our educators on the US-Mexico border.”

– **Juanita Nuñez**

Ocean View Hills, Sunset, Smythe, Willow, and La Mirada elementary schools, San Ysidro School District

“My year as a County TOY was not defined by one singular memory but rather by a soundtrack message that played in the background as I navigated the unique circumstances of each teaching day: “These efforts for my students, my colleagues, and greater school community matter. Keep going.”

– **Melissa Rains**

Castle Park Middle School, Sweetwater Union High School District

For a full list of this year’s San Diego County Teacher of the Year nominees, turn to the inside page.

Tune in to the “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” 30-minute television special in October with highlights from the evening and stories on the new County Teachers of the Year.

SaluteToTeachersSD.com



Salute to Teachers

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THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY OFFICE OF
EDUCATION
LEARNING WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

2023-24 San Diego County Teachers of the Year



Christina Bass

Painted Rock Elementary
Poway Unified School District

A third grade teacher who has taught in the Poway Unified School District for more than a decade, Christina Bass is one of nine children born to parents with limited education but who worked hard. Her father worked with troubled kids who were sometimes homeless. Bass took what she learned by watching her parents and became a teacher, making an impact in the lives of students every day.



Courtney Coffin

Orange Glen High School
Escondido Union High School District

The recipient of numerous awards for her work in special education, Courtney Coffin says her greatest accomplishments are connecting students with a functional communication method and partnering with families. Coffin, whose father experienced a traumatic brain injury, is motivated in her work to help students with disabilities find their voice.



Amanda Ford

Flying Hills School of the Arts
Cajon Valley Union School District

A teacher for 18 years, Amanda Ford learned to love school when her third grade teacher bought her a pair of tap shoes and taught her to tap dance. The special moments of tapping on the linoleum floor and being seen by her teacher inspired Ford to do the same for students today. Previously a teacher at Rancho San Diego Elementary School, Ford recently moved to Flying Hills School for the Arts as a seventh grade teacher.



Wendy Threatt

Felicita Elementary School
Escondido Union School District

Wendy Threatt launched a Girls on the Run team at her previous school, but the pandemic brought it to a halt. After a two-year pause, she started it again at Felicita Elementary School to great success. The program instills teamwork, confidence and friendship-building while bringing back a sense of positivity, pride, and character development.



Melanie Villanueva

District Office
*(formerly at Hilltop Middle School)
Sweetwater Union High School District*

Prior to stepping into her new role at the district office, Melanie Villanueva taught eighth grade general science. A 17-year teaching veteran, Villanueva believes teaching is the most important career and responsibility anyone can have and says it's important to create a welcoming classroom environment where mistakes are part of the discovery process and students learn to believe in themselves and their abilities.

Congratulations to all the nominees!



Diana Tompkins
Joan MacQueen Middle School
Alpine Union School District



Lauren Kennington
Bonsall Elementary
Bonsall Unified School District



Melanie Lupica
Magnolia Elementary
Carlsbad Unified School District



Anika Ito
Fred H. Rohr Elementary
Chula Vista Elementary School District



Erin Marmion
Wolf Canyon Elementary
Chula Vista Elementary School District



Melissa Showman
Myrtle S. Finney Elementary
Chula Vista Elementary School District



Cinzia Fisher
Ocean Air School
Del Mar Union School District



Kirsten Goyette
Flora Vista Elementary
Encinitas Union School District



Carrie McGibney
Rincon Middle School
Escondido Union School District



Emily Avila
Maie Ellis Elementary
Fallbrook Union Elementary School District



David Crabtree
Monte Vista High School
Grossmont Union High School District



Thea Bachmann
Santana High School
Grossmont Union High School District



James Gonzales
La Mesa Arts Academy
La Mesa-Spring Valley School District



John Dungan
Lakeside Middle School
Lakeside Union School District



Sunthai Johnson
San Altos Elementary
Lemon Grove School District



Matthew Heinemann
Pine Valley Middle School
Mountain Empire Unified School District



Ashley Trzcinski
Las Palmas Elementary
National School District



Deborah Dickson
North Terrace Elementary
Oceanside Unified School District



Felicia Ayala
Foussat Elementary
Oceanside Unified School District



Carrie Jennings
Monterey Ridge Elementary
Poway Unified School District



Sanford Carvajal
Mt. Carmel High School
Poway Unified School District



Katie Skahan
James Dukes Elementary
Ramona Unified School District



Sarah Knighton/Visor
HOPE Infant Family Support Program
San Diego County Office of Education



Jillian Salazar
Tierrasanta Elementary
San Diego Unified School District



Julia Rick
Thurgood Marshall Middle School
San Diego Unified School District



Laurisa Murray
Mira Mesa High School
San Diego Unified School District



Leanne Samek
Audubon UTK-8 School
San Diego Unified School District



Lee Yepiz
De Portola Middle School
San Diego Unified School District



Trishaa Camp
Scripps Ranch High School
San Diego Unified School District



Danielle Dorsey
San Marcos Middle School
San Marcos Unified School District



Heather Johnson
San Pasqual Union School
San Pasqual Union School District



Michelle Corderman
Rio Seco School
Santee School District



Natalie Dow
Mar Vista Academy
Sweetwater Union High School District



Devon Marano
Montgomery High School
Sweetwater Union High School District



Julie Carson
Chula Vista High School
Sweetwater Union High School District



Kristy Greenway-August
Eastlake High School
Sweetwater Union High School District



Leslie Bustos
National City Middle School
Sweetwater Union High School District



Melissa Hernandez
San Ysidro High School
Sweetwater Union High School District



Kimberly Williams
Valley Center High School/Valley Center Elementary
Valley Center- Pauma Unified School District



Salute to Teachers



THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

We are thrilled to once again recognize our local educators with the 33rd annual “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers,” brought to you by San Diego County Credit Union.

Every day, our teachers play the lead role in helping students overcome academic barriers, feel safe and welcome, and succeed. Together with counselors, school social workers, and support staff, they are focusing on student health and wellness to ensure students - and their families - have everything they need and deserve.

We recognize the challenges teachers face each day and admire them for persevering and continuing to shine. Teachers: thank you for all you do for our students, and the communities we all call home.

“Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” is an opportunity to spotlight all teachers, recognizing those selected by their districts as teachers of the year, and to announce the five 2023-24 San Diego County Teachers of the Year who will go on to represent our region in the California Teacher of

the Year program.

The new San Diego County teachers of the year were announced during a special reception and show on Friday, Aug. 25. Highlights of the evening will air as part of a “Cox Presents: Salute to Teachers” 30-minute television special in early October on YurView (Channel 4 on Cox and Spectrum).

As a company founded by a teacher, Cox Communications is proud of its 33-year partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education to “Salute” our local teachers.

We also couldn’t do it without the support of all our show’s sponsors, who share our commitment to education and join us in supporting our local teachers. They include returning title sponsor San Diego County Credit Union, Murray Lampert, Procopio, Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, Meritage Wine Market, Oggi’s, The San Diego Union-Tribune, The Mightier 1090 and KPBS.

Thank you for joining us in celebrating our local teachers.



Ingo Hentschel
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