San Bernardino County **School Boards Association**

together with

San Bernardino County
Superintendent of Schools

are proud to present the

2024
SPRING AWARDS

a celebration of excellence for

Education Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Award Recipients

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY EDUCATION MEDAL OF HONOR

Distinguished Service Award

April 29, 2024

San Bernardino County **School Boards Association**

Spring Meeting Agenda

April 29, 2024 | 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Thank you to the advanced ceramics students
from Arroyo Valley High School Club with the
San Berardino City Unified School District
for the design and creation of the centerpieces.

Opening	Cindy Gardner, SBCSBA President *Trustee, Rim of the World Unified School District*
Presentation of Colors	Chaffey High School Navy ROTC Color Guard under the command of Martin A. Jones, Lieutenant Commander US Navy (Ret.), *Chaffey Joint Union High School District*
National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance	Natalia Gomez, Student *Fontana Unified School District*
Words of Inspiration	Monroe Wright, Student Ari Jefferson Pringle, Student *Etiwanda School District*
Dinner Announcements	Dennis Mobley, Governance Consultant *San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools*

2024 Education Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Awards

Recognition of Recipients	Ted Alejandre, County Superintendent *San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools* Cindy Gardner





San Bernardino County

Education Medal of Honor

2024 Award Recipients

Volunteer in Action
Community Volunteer
Ashley Haines
Mt. Baldy Joint School District

Volunteer in Action
Service Group
Pure Land Foundation
San Bernardino City Unified School District

Partners in Education
Small Business or Franchise
Final Touch Construction
Fontana Unified School District

Partners in Education
Corporation or Government Agency
California University of Science and Medicine
Colton Joint Unified School District

Excellence in Education
Education Professional
Dr. Gabe Petrocelli
Chaffey Joint Union High School District

Excellence in Education
Student Alumni
Amy Avila
Needles Unified School District

San Bernardino County

Distinguished Service Award

2024 Recipients

Lea Michelle Cash
Leadership Teacher
San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools

Marcelino "Mars" Serna
Board President
Fontana Unified School District



San Bernardino County

Education Medal of Honor

2024 Award Recipients

The Education Medal of Honor program recognizes individuals and groups who provide outstanding service and support to public education within San Bernardino County. Five of the six categories underscore the contributions, commitment and dedication of community and business supporters of public schools. One category seeks to recognize an exceptional education professional who is making a lasting impact on students and/or the community. This year, 28 extraordinary nominations were submitted with six designees selected to receive a San Bernardino County Education Medal of Honor.

San Bernardino County
Education Medal of Honor
2024 Award Recipients



Ashley Haines

Volunteer in Action
Community Volunteer

In the serene landscape of the Mt. Baldy Joint School District, Ashley Haines shines as a beacon of inspiration, commitment and wonder. Serving as the President of the Mt. Baldy Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Ashley's influence extends far beyond administrative duties.

Driven by her passion for enriching educational experiences, Ashley embarked on a mission to connect students with their incredibly rich environment, nature. The Creek Freaks Program, a brainchild of Ashley's, offers hands-on learning opportunities centered around environmental care and conservation. Through meticulous planning and advocacy, Ashley ensures every student in the district has access to immersive activities focused on water quality, data collection, and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

What sets Ashley apart is her unwavering commitment to encouraging and sustaining positive change. Despite not having a background in environmental sciences, she has dedicated herself to studying, learning, planning, and nurturing the Creek Freaks Program. Her efforts have transformed the program into a cornerstone of the school's curriculum, inspiring students and educators alike. Her commitment to providing innovative opportunities for Mt. Baldy students is backed by engagement and funding from local stakeholders.

To the students, Ashley is more than a PTA President; she is a mentor and a role model. Her infectious enthusiasm and unshakable optimism have instilled in them qualities of curiosity, resilience and empathy, shaping them into future agents of change.

Ashley's contributions to the Mt. Baldy Joint School District and community serve as an enduring reminder of the impact one individual can make in shaping a better world.

San Bernardino County
Education Medal of Honor
2024 Award Recipients



Pure Land Foundation

Volunteer in Action
Service Group

Born from a shared vision to combat food insecurity and uplift communities, Pure Land Foundation has worked to unite the surrounding community through hope, compassion and a shared meal.

Back in 2018 a group of nine individuals, brought together by a common desire to make a tangible difference in the lives of those struggling with hunger, began their journey with a series of enlightening conversations with the San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD). These dedicated educators shed light on the harsh realities faced by students and families grappling with food insecurity, igniting a spark of inspiration in the hearts of the Pure Land Foundation's founding members.

Driven by empathy and a sense of duty, the nonprofit organization embarked on a mission to establish the Mobile Food Pantry Program. Their inaugural event, held at Lincoln Elementary School in December 2018, marked the dawn of a new era in community service. With the support of SBCUSD, Pure Land Foundation set out to deliver more than just food - they sought to nourish hearts and minds, to instill hope in the face of adversity.

Through the years, the Mobile Food Pantry Program has blossomed into a lifeline for thousands of families across San Bernardino. With each distribution event, Pure Land Foundation's impact reverberates throughout the community, touching the lives of students, parents and volunteers alike. What began as a humble endeavor has since evolved into a symbol of resilience and unity, a testament to the transformative power of compassion in action.

By providing fresh produce alongside pantry staples, Pure Land Foundation not only fills stomachs but also nourishes the spirit.

San Bernardino County
Education Medal of Honor
2024 Award Recipients



Final Touch Construction

Partners in Education
Small Business or Franchise

Fontana High School and Final Touch Construction have built a strong partnership from the ground up. Spearheaded by Luis Echeverria, President of Final Touch Construction, the collaboration wasn't just about business; it was about investing in the community's future through education.

It all began with a shared vision of bridging the gap between traditional learning and practical application. In September 2023, this vision materialized as Final Touch Construction joined forces with Fontana High School's Woodshop CTE Pathway students for a barn restoration project at the Pepper Street Agricultural Museum. Over four days, 35 high school students worked alongside the professionals, gaining invaluable hands-on experience in carpentry and restoration while revitalizing a piece of Fontana's heritage.

Recognizing the evolving needs of Fontana High School's CTE programs, Luis embarked on a new mission to enhance the learning experiences of Fire Technology CTE Pathway students. Through a collaborative effort between Final Touch Construction, the Fontana Rotary Club, and San Bernardino County Fire, Luis was able to provide a generous donation of a retired fire engine to Fontana students in January 2024. Through this donation, students could now engage in real-world scenarios, learning essential safety protocols and understanding of the mechanics of firefighting firsthand.

The partnership between Fontana High School and Final Touch Construction, has allowed Luis' passion for education and community service to come to life. The joint effort exemplifies Fontana's dedication to empowering students and enriching educational opportunities.

As Luis and his team continue to invest in the future, the legacy of their partnership will help shape the lives of students for years to come.

San Bernardino County
Education Medal of Honor
2024 Award Recipients



California University of Science and Medicine

Partners in Education
Corporation or Government Agency

Founded with a mission to inspire, motivate and empower the next generation of physicians and leaders, California University of Science and Medicine (CUSM) has woven itself into the fabric of the Inland Empire, becoming a source of abundant opportunity and a catalyst for change.

CUSM is deeply committed to addressing healthcare disparities. Recognizing the shortage of physicians in the Inland Empire, CUSM set out on a journey to cultivate home-grown talent. Their visionary approach, the Health Career Collaborative Program, a transformative initiative in partnership with the Colton Joint Unified School District (CJUSD), allows CUSM doctors and medical students to serve as mentors, educators and guides, inspiring future generations of healthcare professionals. From engaging health curriculum to hands-on workshops, the program instills in students the belief that a career in healthcare can be within their reach.

From mastering blood pressure measurement techniques to exploring emergency room case studies, the Health Career Collaborative Program sessions are more than just lessons—they're steppingstones towards a brighter future. CUSM's reach doesn't stop at one concentrated program. Through initiatives like the Street Medicine program, which engages high school students in serving the homeless population, CUSM is nurturing not just future physicians but compassionate, community-minded individuals.

CUSM's commitment to community health extends far beyond the classroom. Staffed by compassionate students and physicians, their mission to provide vital medical services to those who need it most, offers a lifeline to families who may have otherwise gone without care. CUSM is breaking down barriers to healthcare access, one patient at a time.

San Bernardino County
Education Medal of Honor
2024 Award Recipients



Dr. Gabe Petrocelli

Excellence in Education
Education Professional

In 1968, a young educator stepped into the realm of teaching, unaware that his footsteps would echo across the halls of education for decades to come. Dr. Gabe Petrocelli's journey was driven by his passion for music, which led him to an incredibly harmonious career in education, shaping young minds and fostering a love for music and learning.

Dr. Petrocelli's dedication to education evolved into a symphony of service. No matter his title, he orchestrated initiatives to empower students, guiding them towards academic achievement and professional growth.

After entering retirement, Dr. Petrocelli's service to not only the Chaffey Joint Union High School District (CJUHSD) but the surrounding community continued. He has lent his expertise as a consultant and temporary instructor, weaving threads of excellence into the fabric of education.

His leadership with the Measure P General Obligation Bond Initiative resulted in an $848 million investment in educational infrastructure. His tireless advocacy for the initiative led to transformative changes throughout CJUHSD, such as state-of-the-art facilities and technological advancements.

Amidst the crescendo of educational reform, Dr. Petrocelli's love for the arts remained unwavering. Leading the Chaffey Ontario Community Show Band, he composed harmonies of joy, captivating audiences with performances that transcended the boundaries of music.

His service, spanning over five decades, has left a permanent mark on the landscape of education and community enrichment. Dr. Petrocelli has spent a lifetime dedicated to the pursuit of excellence, a melody that will echo through generations.

San Bernardino County
Education Medal of Honor
2024 Award Recipients



Amy Avila

Excellence in Education
Student Alumni

In the small town of Needles, California, one name shines brightly in the realm of education: Amy Avila. Her journey from student to a revered educator and leader within the Needles Unified School District is not just a narrative of personal success but a testament to the power of dedication, compassion and unwavering commitment to the betterment of her community.

Amy's ties to the Needles community began long before she was born. After her great grandparents settled in town in 1935, the familial roots grew in the community. Since then, her family has been full of Needles alum, with more than a dozen family members having walked through the halls of an NUSD school.

Amy's parents both attended school in Needles and and they weren't the only ones to walk any one of the halls within the school district. Amy, her brother and more than a dozen other family members have been NUSD students at some point in time.

Amy excelled not only academically but also as a standout softball player, earning multiple state titles during her high school career. She made her way back to the dugout when she returned to her alma mater as a teacher and assistant softball coach. Her impact was immediate and profound, leading her teams to multiple state championships.

No matter the roles she's taken on, Amy's dedication to NUSD has allowed her to build, nurture and strengthen ties between the school district and the community by organizing community events, forging partnerships with local businesses, and advocating for initiatives that benefit her students and the place she calls home.



San Bernardino County

Distinguished Service Award

2024 Recipients

The San Bernardino County School Boards Association and the San Bernardino County Committee on School District Organization created the Distinguished Service Award program to celebrate exceptional service sustained over many years by an individual. The award recognizes significant leadership and outstanding contributions to education in San Bernardino County. Additional partners in the awards program are San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools and Fifth District PTA.

San Bernardino County
Distinguished Service Award
2024 Recipient



Lea Michelle Cash

Leadership Teacher
San Bernardino County
Superintendent of Schools

Lea Michelle Cash embarked on her journey of service a decade ago as a dedicated community volunteer at Bob Murphy Community School. Equipped with a vision to address the educational needs of foster and at-risk youth, she founded The Brightest Star, Inc., a nonprofit organization committed to fostering leadership skills and providing essential resources.

Through her tireless efforts and dedication, Lea developed "The Leader in Me" program, a transformative initiative centered on social-emotional learning and leadership development. With an earnest belief in the potential of every student, she has nurtured and empowered over 200 young individuals, instilling in them the confidence and skills needed to succeed both in school and in life.

Her commitment to changing lives is evident in her unique approach, as she passionately advocates for her students, guiding them towards realizing their dreams and unlocking their full potential.

Over the years, Lea has dreamed up enriching experiences for her students, from organizing celebrity speaker events to arranging educational trips to impactful venues like the Museum of Tolerance and The White House. These experiences not only broaden her students' horizons but also serve as powerful catalysts for personal growth and development.

Lea's impact extends beyond the classroom. From delivering inspiring graduation speeches to providing support to those facing homelessness, her influence transcends academic achievement, touching the lives of those she teaches in profound ways.

Her legacy of compassion, leadership and selfless dedication serves as a guiding light for all who aspire to make a difference in the lives of others.

San Bernardino County
Distinguished Service Award
2024 Recipient



Marcelino "Mars" Serna

Board President
Fontana Unified School District

The career of Marcelino "Mars" Serna has been dedicated to educational excellence and community empowerment. Mars' 38-year journey as a dedicated and compassionate public servant has left an indelible mark on the Fontana community and San Bernardino County.

Mars' story is one of tireless advocacy for social justice, equity and meaningful engagement with families and communities. From his early days in the San Bernardino City Unified School District, to his current role as the Family/Community Engagement Program Specialist at San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, Mars has been a catalyst for positive change at every step of his career.

Mars holds a deep-seated belief in the power of education to change lives and unite communities. Through his various roles, he has championed initiatives aimed at bridging the opportunity gap and ensuring that every student, regardless of background or circumstance, has access to a quality education. Most recently, Mars advocated for resources to help establish Fontana Unified School District's first-ever Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Helping create and promote this new role is a testament to his commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive.

As an advocate for community engagement, Mars has forged partnerships and initiatives aimed at addressing the holistic needs of students and families. Whether it's through the establishment of Community Aides in every Fontana school or his involvement in county-wide initiatives to provide essential services, Mars' dedication to uplifting his community knows no bounds.

His journey serves as a testament to the transformative power of service, leadership, and unwavering dedication to the betterment of others.

Thank you!

We thank the nominators for their effort in recognizing and spotlighting individuals/organizations who are making positive contributions in educating our youth in San Bernardino County. We also thank this year's judging panels for their time and effort assessing the competitive nomination entries.

Mission Statement

The mission of the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools is to transform lives through education.

Working in collaboration with school districts, families, our community partners and other agencies, we provide leadership, advocacy and services to ensure equitable, innovative and inspiring educational practices. This endeavor is essential to the quality of life and economic vitality of our communities.

View event photos by scanning the QR code or by visiting **https://bit.ly/4asYDBD**.

Photos will be available in 48 hours.

Transforming lives through education

Office of the Superintendent | Communications and Intergovernmental Relations
601 North E Street, San Bernardino, CA 92415-0020 | 909.386.2413 | sbcss.net