



News Release
For Immediate Release

LIBERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT WELCOMES NEW LEADERSHIP TEAM FOR 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR

Buckeye, AZ (August 20, 2025) — Liberty Elementary School District is proud to announce several key administrative appointments for the 2025–2026 school year, welcoming a group of passionate, experienced, and visionary leaders dedicated to advancing student achievement and supporting educational excellence across the district.

Dr. Erica Avila, Executive Director of Special Education

Dr. Avila has served in a variety of leadership roles, including Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning, Executive Director of Professional Development, and Director of Student Services. She has successfully led school turnaround efforts, improved compliance systems, and built innovative programs to support students and educators alike. Under her leadership, several schools moved from corrective action status to becoming models of best practice recognized by state departments of education.

Her major accomplishments include:

- Leading turnaround work in multiple schools, raising student achievement and strengthening instructional quality.
- Developing and implementing systems to recruit and retain international teachers, ensuring diverse and high-quality staffing in public schools.
- Managing multi-million-dollar state and federal grants to expand student opportunities and improve services.
- Partnering with governing boards and school leaders to enhance district programs, including professional development and community engagement initiatives.

Dr. Avila earned her Doctorate in Education from Arizona State University, and is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist. She is committed to equity, innovation, and ensuring every student has access to high-quality educational opportunities.

Brandon Valdez – Principal, Blue Horizons Elementary

Mr. Valdez brings a robust background in education and public service to Blue Horizons Elementary. With six years of classroom experience teaching middle school math and now in his sixth year as an administrator, Mr. Valdez is a graduate of the National Principal Leadership Academy. He is known for fostering high academic standards, championing staff development, and promoting a culture of accountability and student success.

Michelle May – Director of School Improvement

Michelle May brings nearly 30 years of experience in education to her new role as Director of School Improvement. A Grand Canyon University graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree, Michelle began her career teaching chemistry for more than a decade before earning master's degrees in both Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Leadership. Her diverse experience spans both Title and non-Title schools in rural and suburban communities, where she has led significant improvements in academic outcomes and school culture. At the core of her leadership philosophy is the belief that strong relationships and a connected community are key to empowering educators and cultivating lifelong learners.

Cathy Gentry – Principal, Las Brisas Academy

Cathy Gentry has been named Principal of Las Brisas Academy after serving as Assistant Principal at Blue Horizons Elementary. She brings over 21 years of experience in education, including roles as Director of Curriculum in Osborn School District and English Learner Coordinator in Washington Elementary School District. With master's degrees in Educational Administration and Curriculum & Instruction, Cathy combines leadership with deep instructional knowledge. Her commitment to student achievement and equitable practices will guide Las Brisas into its next chapter of excellence.

Julie Licea– Rainbow Valley Elementary

Bringing 18 years of experience in education, Rainbow Valley's new principal combines a decade of classroom teaching with seven years in educational leadership. Holding dual master's degrees in K–12 Administration and Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment, this leader is deeply committed to supporting both students and educators. At their previous school, they led efforts that doubled academic growth in one year and reduced chronic absenteeism by 20%. Their focus at Rainbow Valley will be to foster a safe, supportive, and high-achieving learning environment.

Theresa Hulihan – Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction

Theresa Hulihan joins the district as Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction, bringing more than 25 years of experience in K–12 and higher education. A specialist in systems thinking, instructional leadership, and data-informed improvement, Theresa previously partnered with LESD as a Learning Acceleration Specialist. She has trained educators across the country in educator evaluation and standards-based instruction, and has contributed to national education committees. Her work with the Library of Congress and recognition through the Raymond G. Van Diest Arts Advocacy Award highlight her lifelong dedication to educational excellence.

Lane Mann – Executive Director of Information Systems and Technology

Lane Mann steps into the role of Executive Director of Information Systems and Technology with a unique blend of service, innovation, and educational leadership. An Arizona native and U.S. Navy submarine veteran, Lane has served as a teacher, department builder, and principal for

incarcerated youth. His work has included creating makerspaces, engineering labs, and tech hubs designed to support diverse learners. A father of three, Lane is committed to reimagining learning through technology, ensuring all LESD students are prepared for a thriving future.

Quote from Interim Superintendent Trevor McDonald:

"At Liberty Elementary School District, we believe leadership matters—and the caliber of our new administrators reflects that belief," said Interim Superintendent Trevor McDonald. *"Each of these individuals brings a wealth of experience, a deep commitment to student growth, and the vision to guide our schools into a bright future. We're excited about what lies ahead and confident in the team leading the way."*

Quote from Lynzee Booras, Principal of Estrella Mountain Elementary School:

"As the longest-serving administrator in the district, I've had the privilege of watching Liberty grow and evolve. This new team represents some of the most talented and student-centered leaders I've ever worked with," said Lynzee Booras. *"Their unique experiences and shared commitment to excellence are exactly what our schools need as we continue to raise the bar for every student, every day."*

If you would like to connect with Mr. Trevor McDonald, please contact Minnie Kamarata, Administrative Assistant, at mkamarata@liberty25.org.

About LESD25

Founded in 1887, the Liberty Elementary School District No. 25 spans 285 square miles including rural and suburban settings. It has grown from a historic one-room schoolhouse, to seven kindergarten through eighth grade schools between Buckeye and Goodyear, educating more than 4,500 students. Each school is tailored to serve students based on their interests through unique signature programs. LESD25 prepares all students for success in high school and beyond with engaging and challenging learning environments. Through individual accomplishment, personal leadership, and contribution to their community, children flourish. Discover more at liberty25.org.

Provide an environment that guarantees all students learn at a high level.

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