

Meet Our Six New Gifted Teachers

Shelby Kerger @ Ocotillo



My name is Shelby Kerger and I am thrilled to be the new Project Potential teacher at Ocotillo this year! I taught in the district many years ago and took a break to start a family. I have a wonderful husband and am the proud mom of three daughters, aged 14, 12 and 10. I taught preschool for several years as my girls were growing up but am excited to be back in WESD. I look forward to a great year!

Marsela Menchaca @ Sahuaro GLC



I am a retired Music teacher of 25 years. I love being an educator which has led me to the path of substitute teaching. I am a mother with a loving son and a grandmother to a beautiful granddaughter.

Christy Gourley @ Sahuaro



I was born and raised in Arizona. Family is incredibly important to me, and I find great joy in raising my four children. Throughout my career in the Washington Elementary School District, I've had the opportunity to teach in a variety of roles—including Kindergarten, 1st grade, 6th grade, general music, and currently, gifted education. I'm a passionate music enthusiast and a devoted dog lover.



Christopher Fregozo @ Arroyo



My name is Christopher Fregozo, and I'm excited to be the new gifted instructor at Arroyo. I'm originally from Yuma, Arizona (the lettuce capital of the world, Go Criminals!) and now live in Phoenix with my wife and two kids. Outside of school, I run a bagel business at the Uptown Farmers Market and play tenor saxophone and flute in a local big band.

Cheryl Benson @ Sweetwater



I am from Chicago, IL and moved to Arizona 25 years ago. I have been teaching for 23 years and have been with WESD for 19 years. I have 4 wonderful boys, three amazing dogs, and a husband of 23 years. I also have a business degree.



Dana Darden @ Lookout Mt.



I have been teaching for 30 years. My husband and I are both natives of Phoenix. We have two sons.



Our WESD Gifted Teachers Welcome Students Back!



Video
Link



WESD Gifted Education Presents: Gifted Family Events 2025-26

Gifted Family Nights

September 30, 2025

Poetry Cafe Gifted Family Night

Gifted t-shirt display

January 27, 2026

Flat Stanley Posters

and Geography Bee Gifted

Family Night

April 21, 2026

Rube Goldberg Model Display Gifted

Family Night

6:00- 7:30pm



Gifted Parent Workshops

November 4, 2025: Motivation and Underachievement in Gifted Learners

March 24, 2026: The Social Emotional Needs of Gifted Learners

6:00-6:45pm

Parent Workshops follow the Orientation for New families (See left) at 5:30-6:00 pm. Participants may come to either or both sessions.

Orientations for New Students

November 4, 2025

5:30-6:00pm

March 24, 2026

5:30-6:00pm

A Gifted Parent workshop will follow at 6:00-6:45pm.



All events are at the WESD District Office
(4650 W. Sweetwater Ave.)



The Family and Teacher Connection for Gifted Families

Parents and teachers work best when they see each other as partners. They have different jobs, but both are important. It helps when parents understand that the classroom is the teacher's space. Teachers are trained to work with gifted and twice-exceptional students, and they have to think about what's best for the whole class, not just one student.

At the same time, teachers should know that parents are experts on their own kids. Parents often notice gifted traits before anyone else. They understand how their child learns, what excites them, and how they communicate. Parents also help teachers understand their child's culture and background.

Parents can let teachers know how their child is doing with schoolwork at home. Teachers can ask parents to help with their child's feelings and friendships. Parents are usually the best people to support their child through tough social or emotional times. Let's work together as partners to help our students succeed. Contact your child's gifted teacher if you have any questions.

Adapted From: <https://www.davidsongifted.org/gifted-blog/the-changing-role-of-parents-in-gifted-educationprograms/#:~:text=9,social%20challenges%20and%20emotional%20upheavals.>

What the best way to keep up with the latest and greatest in WESD gifted education? Check out our gifted Facebook page!

[WESD Gifted Education Program Facebook](#)



Would you like to join other gifted parents on the [Washington Gifted Parent Group Facebook?](#)



Gifted Teacher Contacts for Each School

Abraham Lincoln Traditional School	Chris Dacey Sydney Knight
Acacia	Hannah Marcum
Alta Vista	Deena Condit
Arroyo	Christopher Fregozo
Cactus Wren	Heather Davis
Tumbleweed	Cristin Saiz
Chaparral	Cristin Saiz
Desert View	Christina Mahoney
Ironwood	Sonia Hornbaker
John Jacobs	Patti Ahlman
Maryland	Catie Coleman
Lakeview Newsletter	Heather Davis
Lookout Mountain	Sherry Godfrey Monica Womack Tim Lee Dana Darden
Manzanita	Shirit Levine
Sunset	Shirit Levine
Moon Mountain	Kari Abraham



Our amazing gifted teachers have created newsletters to send out through email or ParentSquare each month to update families about the events in gifted education.

If you have questions or need a copy of the newsletter for your child's school, the teachers' names are linked to their email.

WESD Gifted Coordinator- [Rowe Van Meter](#)

Mountain View	Catie Coleman
Ocotillo	Shelby Kerger
Orangewood	Megan Farni
Richard E Miller	Carissa Demcko
Washington	Rene McClay
Roadrunner	Rene McClay
Sweetwater	Cheryl Benson
Shaw Butte	Becky Detlaff
Sunnyslope	Becky Detlaff
Sunburst	Jessica Lester

Gifted Learning Center at Sahuaro Elementary

[Mary Kate Testa](#)
[Beth Perry](#)
[Variatee Snide](#)
[Marsela Menchaca](#)
[Kristin Holbrook](#)

Please see the weekly "Sunday Blast" newsletter sent to your email.

FLEX Program at Cholla Middle School

[Heidi McKeever](#)- ELA/ Social Studies
[Monica Dunham](#)- Math
[Mark Williams](#)- Science

WESD GIFTED HABITS OF A SCHOLAR AWARDS



KYRO FITTS
4TH GRADE
Acacia



ARCHER SHERIDAN
5TH GRADE
ALTS



MALCOLM GARCIA
1st Grade
Alta Vista



EMILY CORREA CORTES
4th Grade
Alta Vista



JOSHUA LOVATO
6TH GRADE
Arroyo



ADAM GONZALEZ
5TH GRADE
Cactus Wren



EASTON TREADWAY
3RD GRADE
Chaparral



EMILY BARAJAS
8TH GRADE
Cholla



BELLA BERRY
3rd GRADE
Desert View



XANDER LOPEZ
6TH GRADE
Ironwood



ANNALI JENKINS
3RD GRADE
Maryland



ARIANNA BURTON
2ND GRADE
JOHN JACOBS



DANNY HORRALL
3RD GRADE
Lakeview



GRACE GREFKA
5TH GRADE
Lookout Mt.



MILA RIAHI
1ST GRADE
Lookout Mt.



DALEYZA GARCIA
2ND GRADE
Mt. View



ENRIQUE PORREZ SANCHEZ
2ND GRADE
Manzanita



GAGE GIDEON
4TH GRADE
Moon Mt.



JAZIYAH STANTON
6TH GRADE
Orangewood



SANTIAGO ARELLANO ACUNA
3RD GRADE
Ocotillo

HABIT: GOAL SETTING AUGUST 2025

WESD GIFTED HABITS OF A SCHOLAR AWARDS



NIANG LAM CING
4TH GRADE
Roadrunner



EZEQUIEL ZAMBRANO
5TH GRADE
Sahuaro



JUDE YAMANE
5TH GRADE
Sahuaro GLC



HARLEY HEINTZ
5TH GRADE
Sahuaro GLC



RHI'MYA ALEXANDER
5th GRADE
Shaw Butte



TAYLOR KETCHUM
3RD GRADE
Sunburst



JENATH CHAVEZ
2ND GRADE
Sunset



RAQUEL ORTEGA
7TH GRADE
Sunnyslope



ISABELLA FERNANDEZ
6TH GRADER
Sweetwater



MIRANDA GARCIA
6TH GRADE
Washington

What are the Habits of a Scholar?

Dr. Sandra Kaplan identified characteristics that are present in life-long learners and successful students. The habits are: Pondering Ideas, Goal Setting, Preparation, Intellectual Risk-Taking, Academic Humility, Excellence, Saving Ideas, Curiosity, Perseverance and Multiple Perspectives. Each month we highlight gifted students chosen by their gifted teacher who demonstrate a different habit in their gifted classes. Congratulations and thank you to this month's amazing Scholars!

HABIT: GOAL SETTING AUGUST 2025

Conozcan a Nuestros Nuevos Maestros para los Estudiantes Dotados

Shelby Kerger @ Ocotillo



¡Me llamo Shelby Kerger y estoy emocionada de ser la nueva maestra del 'Project Potential' en Ocotillo este año! Muchos años atrás enseñé en el distrito y me tomé un descanso para formar una familia. Tengo un esposo maravilloso y soy la orgullosa madre de tres hijas, de edades 14, 12 y 10. Enseñé preescolar por varios años mientras mis hijas crecían, pero estoy emocionada de volver al WESD. ¡Espero con emoción por un gran año!

Marsela Menchaca @ Sahuaro GLC



Soy una maestra de música jubilada con 25 años de experiencia. Amo ser una educadora, lo que me ha llevado al camino de la enseñanza sustituta. Soy madre de un hijo cariñoso y abuela de una nieta preciosa.

Christy Gourley @ Sahuaro



Nací y crecí en Arizona. La familia es increíblemente importante para mí y encuentro mucha felicidad en criar a mis cuatro hijos. A lo largo de mi carrera en el Distrito Escolar Primario Washington, he tenido la oportunidad de enseñar en una variedad de puestos—incluyendo Kindergarten, 1^{er} grado, 6.^o grado, música general y actualmente educación para estudiantes dotados. Soy una apasionada entusiasta de la música y una devota amante de los perros.

Cheryl Benson @ Sweetwater



Soy de Chicago, IL y me mudé a Arizona hace 25 años. He estado enseñando por 23 años y he estado con el WESD por 19 años. Tengo 4 hijos maravillosos, tres perros increíbles y un esposo con el que llevo 23 años. También tengo un título en negocios.



Christopher Fregozo @ Arroyo



Me llamo Christopher Fregozo, y estoy emocionado de ser el nuevo instructor para los estudiantes dotados en Arroyo. Soy originario de Yuma, Arizona (la capital mundial de la lechuga, ¡Go Criminals!) y ahora vivo en Phoenix con mi esposa y mis dos hijos. Fuera de la escuela, dirijo un negocio de 'bagels' en 'Uptown Farmers Market' y toco el saxofón tenor y la flauta en una banda local grande.



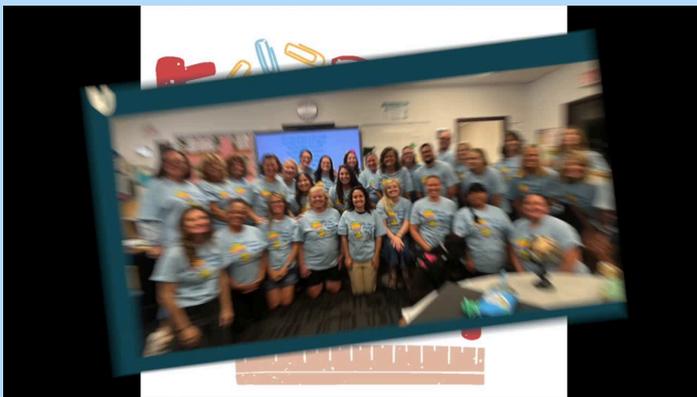
Dana Darden @ Lookout Mt.



He estado enseñando por 30 años. Mi esposo y yo somos originarios de Phoenix. Tenemos dos hijos.



¡Nuestros Maestros para Estudiantes Dotados del WESD dan la Bienvenida Nuevamente a los Estudiantes!



Enlace
Video



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La Conexión entre las Familias y Maestros para Familias con Estudiantes Dotados

Los padres y maestros trabajan mejor cuando se ven como aliados. Tienen trabajos diferentes, pero los dos son importantes. Ayuda cuando los padres comprenden que el salón de clase es el espacio de los maestros. Los maestros son entrenados para trabajar con estudiantes dotados y doblemente excepcionales, y ellos tienen que pensar en lo que es mejor para toda la clase, no solo para un estudiante. De la misma manera, los maestros debiesen saber que los padres son expertos en sus propios hijos. Los padres a menudo notan rasgos de dotados antes que cualquier otra persona. Ellos entienden cómo sus hijos aprenden, que los emociona y cómo se comunican. Los padres también ayudan a que los maestros conozcan la cultura y antecedentes de sus hijos. Los padres les pueden informar a los maestros sobre cómo sus hijos se están realizando con las tareas en casa. Los maestros les pueden pedir a los padres que ayuden a sus hijos con sus sentimientos y amistades. A menudo los padres son las personas más indicadas para apoyar a sus hijos durante momentos sociales o emocionales difíciles. Trabajemos unidos como aliados para ayudar a nuestros estudiantes a ser exitosos. Comuníquense con los maestros para estudiantes dotados de sus hijos si tienen cualquier pregunta.

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¿Cuál es la mejor manera de mantenerse al día de lo más reciente y lo mejor de la educación para los estudiantes dotados del WESD? ¡Visiten nuestra página Facebook para estudiantes dotados!

[\(Programa de Educación para Estudiantes Dotados del WESD en Facebook\)](#)



¿Le gustaría unirse a otros padres talentosos en el

[Grupo de Padres de Estudiantes Dotados de Washington en Facebook](#)