# 2026 STAR AWARDS

Recognition of Dedication & Staff Excellence

NLM

NORWALK - LA MIRADA
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

# Welcome to the 2026 Star Awards

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April 1, 2026

Welcome to the 2026 STAR Awards!

Tonight, we come together to celebrate the people who make Norwalk-La Mirada Unified truly special, our dedicated colleagues whose passion, talent, and heart uplift our entire community. The impact of our honorees reaches far beyond the classroom, shaping lives and creating opportunities for every student we serve.

This evening, we proudly recognize individuals who embody the very best of public education. Their commitment reflects our shared mission: to equip every student with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to thrive as lifelong learners and successful, contributing members of an ever-changing world.

To our honorees, thank you for the difference you make each and every day. Your work inspires us all.

Enjoy this well-deserved celebration as we honor an extraordinary group of professionals who continue to shine brightly across our District.

Sincerely,



Tania Magaña, M.A. Ed
Interim Superintendent

# Sponsors

City of Norwalk
Norwalk-La Mirada Administrator's Association
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Schools First Credit Union

# A Special Thanks

Division of Human Resources
ITS
Hutchinson Middle School
Norwalk High School Advanced Choir
Southeast Academy
Steve Fericean, Director, Purchasing & Warehouse
Christopher K. Hargraves, Public Information Officer
Craig Jordan, Band Teacher, Hutchinson Middle School
Desiree Flores, Music Vocal Teacher, Norwalk High School
Matthew B. Roberts, Publications Specialist

# Program

## PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Southeast Academy Color Guard

## NATIONAL ANTHEM

Kayla Alvarez
Student, Norwalk High School

## WELCOME

Tania Magaña, M.A. Ed
Interim Superintendent

## RETIREE RECOGNITION

Michael R. Gotto, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources

## EMPLOYEE YEARS OF SERVICE RECOGNITION

Mike A. Garcia
Director, Human Resources

## STUDENT SHOWCASE PERFORMANCE

Norwalk High School Advanced Choir

## PRESENTATION OF STAR AWARD WINNERS

Martha Jauregui, CSEA President
Maureen Quiros Gray, TANLA President

## PRESENTATION OF DISTRICT WELLNESS AWARD

Mike A. Garcia
Director, Human Resources

## PRESENTATION OF ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR

Michael R. Gotto, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources

## CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

## TEACHER OF THE YEAR

## CLOSING

Michael R. Gotto, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources

# Committee Members

## CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE

Martha Jauregui, CSEA President
Christian F. Macias Solis, CSEA Vice President
- Jonathan Mata, Student and Family Services Department
Evelyn Rodriguez, Maintenance Department

## TEACHER OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE

Maureen Quiros Gray, TANLA President
Luz Jimenez, Norwalk High School
Sarah Malec, Corvallis Middle School
Jackie Nguyen, Escalona Elementary School
Natalia Valadez, Norwalk High School

## CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Lisa Aguilar, Special Education Department
Cynthia Diaz, Edmondson Elementary School
Joshua Zeigler, Technology Services Department

## TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Andrea Cardoso, Norwalk High School
Michelle Rangel, Hutchinson Middle School
Julie Wright, Gardenhill Elementary School

# STAR AWARDS
## Employee Years of Service

### 25 Years

Mary Adeleke
Gita K. Agarwal
Norma Altamirano
Maria E. Alvarez
Clayton H. Barragan
Sonia Bravo
Sylvana Calahorrano
Juan M. Carbajal
Lakesha M. Carpenter
Maria Chacon
Kimberly F. Chavez
May Q. Chuong-Nguyen
Hilda Cruz-Thomson
George M. Da Silva
Anthony Devoe
Denise E. Dunphy
Kenneth Elisaldez
Marianne Fox
Anthony Gaglio
Silvia L. Garcia
Nancy B. Garita
Noel Gil
Esperanza Hernandez
Vilma Herrera
Christine E. Hita
Benjamin Jaurequi
Cynthia Johnson
Shawn M. Johnson
Joanne J. Jung
Emily J. Klauk
Anita Ladd
Linda A. Lastre
Joanne Lazatin
Wendy A. Lewis
Michelle Lobendahn
Kristen D. Lockhart
Juan A. Lopez
Tammey J. Machurski
Laurence M. Martinez
Elva Mendoza
David Miramontes
Jaclyn Nguyen
Brian J. O'Leary
Brian P. Patterson
Darlene Pedroza
Doreen B. Perez
Greg R. Peter
Jennifer Petruescu
Amy J. Phillips
Vinson Pluma
Brenda Porras
Amalia C. Reta
Mario A. Retana
Robin Ridgeway
Geri K. Rodriguez
Ruth Rodriguez
Mona N. Ruiz
Rebecca E. Schuler
Marisa Silva
Kimberly M. Slater
Pedro Soria
Marvin Soto
Sharon M. Stewart
Fatima Van Hartingsveldt
Victor Villanueva
Eric P. Walter
Dean E. Westerfield
Catherine C. White
Yulanda Wilbert

# STAR AWARDS
## *Employee Years of Service*

### 30 Years

Amalia Arias
Beverly A. Berger
Elsa O. Covarrubias
Olivia Cuevas
Julie R. Delgado
Stephanie L. Derr
Trisha Dulken
Bradley Erickson
Ronda Feese
Marissa Garcia
Socorro Gomez
Jose Guerrero
Laura Iovino
Sheree Johnson
Teresa Lopez
Angela Mac Gregor
Cari M. Madden-Murray
Kenneth E. Mason
Darlene Moreno
Timothy G. Pelonis
Kimberly D. Perry
Irma Pimentel
Jinhee D. Rah
Lorrie Salcido
Felicia A. Sandoval
Michele Sholty
Thomas Taylor Jr.
Ramona R. Vasquez
David M. Vesper
Kathleen M. Wharton
Derek A. Wood

### 35 Years

Vicki Coley
Sendy Engstrum
Daren Estes
Randall Frazier
Deborah K. Henderson
Jerry Koppe
Rosie S. Mawson
Laura Navarrette
Regina Podany
Maria C. Rivera
Vickie L. Roberts
Maria E. Sambrano
Guadalupe Sanchez
Rosa Valenzuela

### 40 Years

Janet Belo
Linda Burch
Rebecca Gonzales
Maria Gonzalez
Luis E. Ramirez
Eva E. Ponce Vasquez

### 50 Years

Amy S. Takata

# DOLLAND Elementary School

**Estela Salas-Sarmiento, Ed.D., Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## *Valerie L. Jesolva*

Mrs. Jesolva has been with the district for 10 years. During her first few years with NLMUSD, she served as the math liaison at her site. In her third year, she was selected as the Cotsen mentor for Dolland, a role she held for four years. Through the Cotsen program, she received extensive training in CGI math, reading, writing, and science from top-tier professionals in their respective fields. She was especially drawn to CGI because it empowers all learners to make sense of their learning in ways that are meaningful to them. She is a shining star, and we love her leading the Husky PACK!

## *Amanda G. Ortiz*

Mrs. Amanda, as the students lovingly call her, is impossible to miss with her vibrant, ever-changing hair. You'll find her dancing with students and leading with joy, yet running a smooth operation at Dolland. She perfectly balances high expectations, strong supervision, and genuine care every day for our entire school. Dolland has been lucky to have her for 10 years!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# DULLES Elementary School

**Shanti Gallegos, Principal**



Teacher of the Year

## Michael R. Craddock

Mr. Craddock brings humor, structure, and leadership to our school. He works with a team to coordinate our talent show, MCs family events, partners with PTA, and supports our arts program. A trusted teacher, he builds strong family relationships and serves on key committees. His reliability and commitment strengthen our school community.

## Monica Medina

Mrs. Medina has served in NLMUSD over 7 years in various roles. This is her third year as the school secretary at Dulles Elementary School. Her warm, caring approach and welcoming customer service support students, staff, and families daily. She is the heart of our school—helpful, dependable, and consistent in attending to the needs of our staff and students with warmth and compassion.



Classified Employee of the Year

# EASTWOOD
# Elementary School

**Darryll Ramsey, Jr., Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Jinhee D. Rah

Mrs. Jinhee Rah is a dedicated 1st grade teacher who serves the Eastwood community with dedication, focus, and passion. Mrs. Rah has been an active member of the Eastwood family leading the Korean afterschool academy, serving on site leadership, and collaborating and supporting colleagues across grade levels.

## Hugo R. Correa Jr.

Mr. Hugo Correa is the hardworking Senior Custodian of Eastwood Elementary. Since stepping into the role, Mr. Correa strives to maintain a clean and presentable campus for staff, students, and families. He regularly connects with students and supports staff whenever the need arises. Eastwood is grateful for him.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# EDMONDSON
# Elementary School

**Sharon Stewart, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Claudia Sosa

Mrs. Claudia Sosa is a dedicated, kindhearted educator whose passion for students and dual language instruction makes learning engaging and joyful. As a generous team member and lifelong learner, she shares expertise freely, inspires colleagues and families, and models excellence through innovative instruction, authentic relationships, and a strong commitment to academic achievement and social-emotional growth.

## Cynthia Diaz

Edmondson's Elementary Student Support Specialist (ESSS), Ms. Cynthia Diaz, exemplifies dedication and compassion through her unwavering support of students, families, and staff. A leader in social-emotional learning and PBIS, she strengthens school culture, builds meaningful connections, and extends her impact through collaboration and advocacy for student well-being.




**Classified Employee of the Year**

# ESCALONA Elementary School

**Nnenna Okpara, Ed.D., Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Ron Della Valle

Ron Della Valle leads with heart, intention, and high expectations. His classroom is a place where students feel seen, challenged, and supported. He is deeply reflective in his practice and generous with his expertise, quietly elevating both student learning and the colleagues who work alongside him.

## Stefani Y. Basagoiti

Stefani Basagoiti is the kind of person every school hopes to have. She shows up each day with care, reliability, and a steady commitment to doing what's best for students. Her presence brings calm, trust, and consistency, and her work makes our school run better in ways that truly matter.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# FOSTER ROAD
# Elementary School

**Salvador Villagomez, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Maggie M. Pierce

If anyone wanted to look up an excellent Intervention TOSA, they would find a picture of Maggie Pierce from Foster Road. Maggie is a go getter. She is always stepping up to help children and staff; in any way she can. She is an integral part of the instructional team, as well as a member of the Foster Road PTA board. Maggie is indispensable, and Foster Road is so lucky to have her in our school community! Congratulations Maggie on this well-deserved honor.

## Steve K. Trujillo

Steve Trujillo is a STAR custodian. He is completely dedicated to excellent service to the students and staff at Foster Road. When Steve is on the job, everyone knows that things will be done well and on time. He is a true gem and a valuable member of the Foster Road Staff. Thank you for all you do, Steve!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# GARDENHILL
# Elementary School

**Sarah Gilbert, Principal**




**Teacher of the Year**

## Julie Wright

Julie Wright has served Gardenhill for over 20 years. Her engaging, encouraging classroom buzzes with learning, love, and creating lasting friendships. Her effortless teaching style has shaped generations of families, making her a cherished, respected, and deeply loved member of our community.

## Maria Torres

Maria Torres provides outstanding service as a supervision aide and has served the Gardenhill community for over 20 years. A welcoming force, she greets her “love bugs” each morning and offers encouragement, support, and problem-solving skills throughout the day. As a trusted member of the community, she’s loved by all!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# GLAZIER Elementary School

**Susan Newcomb, Ph.D., Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Ruther P. Romey

Ruther Romey is an inspiring educator. He creates a classroom where curiosity thrives and every student feels valued. Through dedication, creativity, and compassion, he turns challenges into opportunities, motivates lifelong learning, and positively impacts students, colleagues, and the school community every day. Thank you, Mr. Romey!

## Raina Y. Franco

A dedicated professional, Raina Franco goes above and beyond to support students, staff, and daily operations. Her reliability, student-centered approach, and strong work ethic combine to create a safe environment, strengthen the school community, and ensure excellence through consistent service and teamwork. Thank you, Mrs. Franco!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# JOHNSTON Elementary School

**Krystal Jones, Ed.D., Principal**



Teacher of the Year

## Gabriela Duarte

Gaby Duarte is an outstanding fifth grade teacher, Cotsen Fellow, and member of our leadership team. She deeply cares for every child and builds strong relationships with families, staff, and students. Year after year, her class demonstrates continuous academic growth. We are truly fortunate to have her at our school.

## Maria A. Tribouillier

Maria Tribouillier is a wonderful reading and math tutor and a vital part of Johnston's intervention and enrichment program. She works collaboratively with all staff, cares deeply about meeting the needs of every learner, and is always professional, flexible, and willing to support in any way. Johnston is lucky to have her.



Classified Employee of the Year

# LA PLUMA Elementary School

**Maureen Bixby, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Michelle R. Lee

Dedicated, collaborative, and supportive describes Teacher of the Year, Michelle Lee. Her commitment to her students and the La Pluma community shines daily. She creates a learning environment that addresses the needs of all learners, works tirelessly to strengthen school culture, and inspires colleagues through leadership and unwavering dedication to provide meaningful experiences for ALL students.

## Robin L. Vasquez

Dedication, teamwork, and commitment describe La Pluma Classified Employee of the Year, Robin Vasquez. Ms. Robin supervises students daily, ensuring safety, respect, and responsibility across campus. She's a true doer in her role and leads by example. We proudly celebrate her impact. Congratulations, Ms. Robin!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# LAMPTON Elementary School

**Ana Quiroz, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## *Marisa Garcia-Regaldo*

Marisa's dedication to her students, passion for teaching, and tireless commitment to excellence truly makes a difference every day. Lampton Elementary School is so grateful for her hard work and the heart she brings to our school community.

## *Angelica J. Montes*

Angie's unwavering positivity, strong work ethic, and behind-the-scenes support are essential to Lampton Elementary School's success. Her commitment and care do not go unnoticed, and we are incredibly thankful for all that she does!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# MOFFITT Elementary School

**Gabriela Galvez-Reyna, Ed.D., Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Julissa Closson

Mrs. Closson is a dedicated and highly respected educator who has served Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District since 1998. With extensive experience in general education and several years in dual immersion, she joined the Moffitt Elementary family a few years ago and continues to make a meaningful impact on students and staff.

## Ana Maria Gonzalez

Ana Gonzalez, our Student Support Specialist, is a dedicated and compassionate staff member who consistently goes above and beyond to support Moffitt students and families. She is a trusted resource on campus and plays a vital role in fostering a caring, connected, and supportive Mustang community.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# MORRISON Elementary School

**Patrick Lazo, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Javier Rodriguez

With 29 years of teaching experience, Javier exemplifies the qualities of a lifelong educator. He cares for others as if they were family, and this is what drives his passion for education. Javier wants to be the best educator possible for his students and always goes above and beyond for them.

## Bernadette P. Garcia

Bernadette has dedicated forty years to NLMUSD, faithfully supporting students as a paraeducator. Through patience, compassion, and unwavering commitment, she has empowered learning, nurtured growth, and strengthened classrooms. Her steady presence has shaped countless lives, leaving a legacy of service, advocacy, and educational excellence for future generations of learners.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# NEW RIVER Elementary School

**Jody Gardner, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Lori A. Coggins

Lori Coggins, our Intervention TOSA, leads with heart and purpose each day. She consistently supports students and colleagues, offering help before it's asked. As a skilled educator, she breaks learning into meaningful steps for small groups. Her positivity and kindness make New River a place where everyone thrives.

## Josefina Suazo

Josefina Suazo brings warmth and positivity to New River every day. As the school secretary, she supports staff, students, and families with kindness and care. As a thoughtful listener, she checks in, follows through, and helps wherever needed. Josie's presence truly holds our school community together. Congratulations, Josie!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# NUFFER Elementary School

**Makara Sar, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Nicole C. Peña

Nicole Peña exemplifies excellence at Nuffer STEAM Academy as a dedicated intervention teacher who skillfully uses data to drive instruction. She analyzes student progress, targets learning gaps, and implements effective support. Her commitment, innovation, and collaboration with families make her an outstanding Teacher of the Year representative. Congrats Nicole!

## Veronica X. Navarro

Veronica Navarro is an exceptional Classified Employee of the Year as our Media Tech. She supports students through targeted intervention and ELD services, builds strong relationships, and ensures equitable access to learning. Her dedication, flexibility, and student-centered approach make a lasting impact every day. Congrats Veronica!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# SANCHEZ Elementary School

**Alicia Rubio, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Hong Nehme

Hong Nehme was chosen by her peers as Teacher of the Year for her dedication, instructional excellence, and commitment to students. She fosters an inclusive, engaging classroom, collaborates meaningfully with colleagues, and consistently supports student growth through high expectations, reflection, and a passion for learning.

## Mireya Chavez

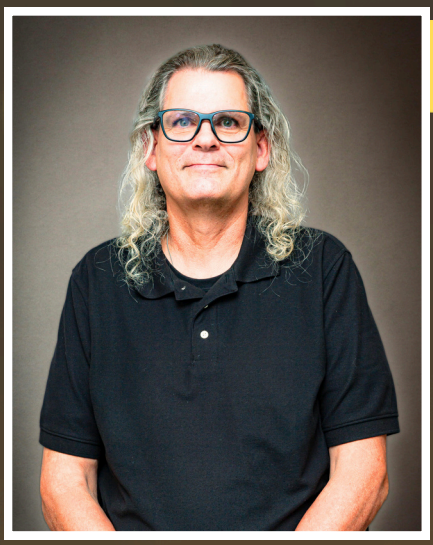
Mireya Chavez-Melendez was chosen as Classified Employee of the Year for her constant support, patience, and kindness. She is always ready to help, supports her colleagues without hesitation, and helps create a positive, welcoming school where teamwork and care make a difference every day.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# BENTON Middle School

**Robin Ridgeway, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Martin E. Strauss

Mr. Strauss is a favorite teacher among students. He makes math fun and understandable, and students enjoy being in his class. But he is more than just a teacher in the classroom; he willingly gives his time to support everyone at Benton, including colleagues and its students. He makes himself available to students, forging positive relationships and supporting students in their learning.

## John J. Medina

John is an asset to Benton. He takes pride in ensuring that the campus is clean, beautiful, and well maintained. He anticipates our needs and handles problems before they arise. He's a favorite with staff and students and always has a smile and a fix for whatever we need.




**Classified Employee of the Year**

# CORVALLIS Middle School

**Alejandra Rosales, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Esperanza Hernandez

With 26 years of service, Esperanza shines as an inspiring English and AVID educator. She fosters engaging classrooms, ignites curiosity, and builds critical skills. As a trusted leader and coordinator, she strengthens programs, mentors' colleagues, engages families, and elevates student success across the Corvallis community, making a lasting positive impact.

## Norma Orozco

Norma Orozco welcomes students, families, and staff with professionalism and warmth. Her organization and calm problem-solving keep daily operations at Corvallis running smoothly. Always dependable; she anticipates needs, supports administrators and teachers, and creates a positive, student-centered environment through consistent excellence and genuine care daily.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# HUTCHINSON Middle School

**Jenny Bae, Principal**




**Teacher of the Year**

## Michelle K. Rangel

Michelle Rangel started teaching Special Education moderate to severe in 2010 at NLMUSD. She has both a moderate/severe and a general education credential as well as a master's in education. Mrs. Rangel is an exceptional teacher who goes above and beyond in her classroom and after school to create a school experience that is meaningful and supportive for our students. Mrs. Rangel works tirelessly with her classroom students and always looks at their differences as starting points rather than problems to fix. She celebrates small victories that others may overlook and notices what each student needs to feel safe enough to try. Her classroom is not just a place of learning but a place of belonging. Her students leave the classroom every day with not only new skills but with confidence because they have a teacher who believes in them fully and never stops showing it! Mrs. Rangel also dedicates her time after school to coach Hutchinson's cheer team; her commitment and dedication has been instrumental in the ongoing success and growth of the team! Most recently Hutchinson cheer earned the title as district champions. Congratulations to Mrs. Rangel for being awarded Hutchinson's Teacher of the Year!

## Faviola Vargas

Ms. Faviola Vargas has been part of our district for 33 years. She started as a substitute Nutrition Service Worker at the Central Kitchen and then became the Food Service Manager for the past 19 years. Ms. Faviola always goes far beyond her role as Cafeteria Manager at Hutchinson; she leads with kindness, dedication, and a genuine heart for students. Whether it's offering a warm smile, a listening ear, or quietly making sure a student who needs extra support is cared for, she never hesitates to step in and help. For many students, the cafeteria is more than a place to eat-it's a place where they feel seen and safe because of her. Her compassion, consistency, and commitment make a lasting difference every single day. We are incredibly grateful for all she does to support our students and our school community.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# LOS ALISOS Middle School

**Phillip Sanchez, Ed.D., Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Geena N. Biondi

Mrs. Biondi exemplifies the qualities of an outstanding Teacher of the Year at Los Alisos Middle School. She consistently goes above and beyond to provide meaningful learning experiences for her students, creating opportunities for them to perform music in front of peers, parents, and the broader school community, including at school events and athletic competitions.

Beyond her classroom impact, Mrs. Biondi demonstrates exceptional leadership as the TANLA representative. She advocates for her colleagues with fairness, professionalism, and integrity, ensuring all voices are heard while keeping students' best interests at the center of her work. It is a true privilege to recommend Mrs. Biondi for Teacher of the Year.

## Sarah D. Cardenas

Sarah Cardenas is an invaluable member of our school community whose work positively impacts students, families, and staff. She provides exceptional customer service, maintains accurate attendance records, and communicates clearly with families. Her proactive support of attendance and academic opportunities makes her truly deserving of Classified Employee of the Year.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# WAITE Middle School

**Adriana Nakano, Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Kristie L. Coley

Kristie began her career with the NLMUSD in 2004 as a first-grade general education teacher. Driven by a strong commitment to ensuring all students receive the support they need to succeed, she earned her Education Specialist credential. In her current role as an RSP teacher at Waite Middle School, Kristie empowers students to develop self-advocacy skills and independence. In addition, Kristie supports her colleagues by serving as the assessment liaison and TANLA site representative. Congratulations to our Certificated Employee of the Year, Kristie Coley!

## Monique M. Ramirez

Monique has dedicated herself to supporting students, families, and colleagues at Waite for over 3 years. She has regularly demonstrated a superior attitude with a consistent commitment to building an inclusive, caring and supportive community for all students. Monique is an exceptional team player who consistently contributes where assistance is needed and strengthens Waite. Her cheerful demeanor and inspiring outlook make Waite an inviting and energizing environment for students, families, and colleagues. Congratulations to our Classified Employee of the Year, Monique Ramirez!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# EL CAMINO High School

**Mark Hunter, Director/Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Chen Hsu Cheng

Mrs. Chen Hsu Cheng has taught at NLMUSD for 12 years. In her 7 years at El Camino, she has taught Computer Science, Yearbook, and Credit Recovery. Her favorite thing about teaching at El Camino is interacting with the students each day and running the East Meets West Club on campus.

## Jessie D. Chavez

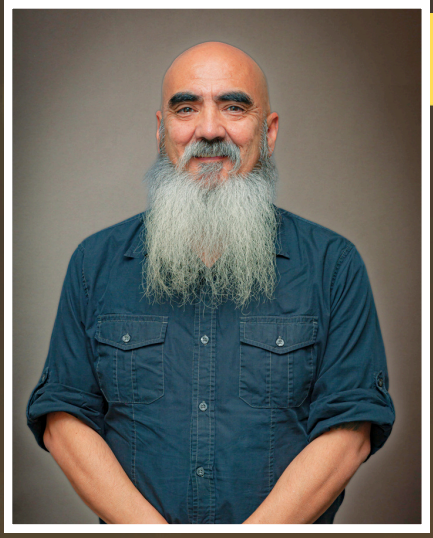
Jessie Chavez has served at NLMUSD for 4 years, with the last 2.5 being at El Camino as the Night Custodian. His favorite part of the job is helping to serve people and being around the staff on a daily basis. Jessie takes great pride in keeping the site clean and safe.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# JOHN GLENN High School

**Jennifer Padilla, Ed.D., Principal**



**Teacher of the Year**

## Frank A. Hinojoz

Mr. Frank Hinojoz, JGHS Band Director and alumnus (Class of 1990), is widely respected and voted Certificated Employee of the Year by his colleagues. He has inspired thousands of students to musical excellence, earning superior ratings and leading the Marching Eagles in the Rose Parade through his passion for music and educating students.

## Adriana Lopez

Adriana Lopez has served in the district since 2005 and at John Glenn High School since 2006. Over 20 years, she has earned deep respect from students, staff, and parents through roles including Security Assistant, Cheer Coach, SIT and Culture & Climate member, and Plant Protection Officer, exemplifying exceptional dedication and service.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# LA MIRADA High School

**Ben Webster, Principal**



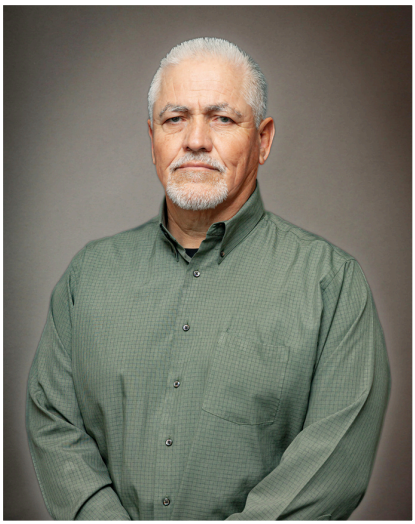
**Teacher of the Year**

## Rebecca Upson

Rebecca Upson defines a professional science teacher. Mrs. Upson maintains high standards for learning while valuing hands-on experiences that make the curriculum come alive. Mrs. Upson's passion for the environment and sustainability has significantly influenced her students, and she will have a generational impact upon the students who know and love her.

## Gustavo Sanchez

Gustavo Sanchez loves his students, and he takes tremendous pride in leading his team to provide a clean and safe learning environment. Gus regularly wins Staff of the Month because he takes the time to build relationships with the people around him, and we are proud to have him represent LMHS.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# NORWALK High School

**David Olea, Ed.D., Principal**




**Teacher of the Year**

## Andrea A. Cardoso

Mrs. Andrea Cardoso is a shining light at NHS. Her work as an English Teacher, Link Crew advisor, and Renaissance advisor has made a tremendous impact on the culture of our campus and shaped the lives of so many of our students. She bleeds purple and gold!

## Rubie R. Mendez

Ms. Rubie Mendez is an innovative and creative member of the NHS team. Since day one, she has always sought ways to make our campus more efficient and welcoming for students and families.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# NORWALK-LA MIRADA *Adult School*

**Mindy Chung, Director**



**Teacher of the Year**

## *Inaam Zakaria*

Mrs. Inaam Zakaria has served Norwalk-La Mirada Adult School for 22 years as a dedicated and compassionate educator. She supports adults with disabilities, teaches CTE and computer basics courses, and empowers learners across both campuses. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition.

## *Marylou Hernandez*

Marylou Hernandez joined Norwalk-La Mirada Adult School three years ago as Secretary III. She greets staff and students with warmth and professionalism each day. A true team player, her willingness to support both large and small needs has earned her the 2025–26 Classified Employee of the Year honor.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# EARLY EDUCATION *Program*

**Lorena Sierra Ed.D., Director**



**Teacher of the Year**

## *Vilma Denisse Herrera*

Vilma Herrera is a force and an inspiration to colleagues and families alike. She is deeply committed to her community, elevating family voices and strengthening advocacy and school readiness. Trusted as a leader, Vilma brings love, harmony, and dedication to her role as a Home-Based teacher.

## *Adelita Covarrubias*

Adelita Covarrubias brings warmth and dedication to her work each day. With her welcoming smile, she collaborates seamlessly with colleagues to create joyful, supportive learning environments. Committed to helping others shine, Adelita fosters a strong sense of community where students and staff learn and grow together.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# BUSINESS SERVICES *Division*

**Estuardo Santillan, Assistant Superintendent**



## *Jennifer L. Williford*

Jenn brings a positive, welcoming attitude to the fiscal services department. She is always willing to assist anyone who calls or visits our office. Her professionalism, dedication, and commitment to excellence have made our department stronger and more successful. We are extremely happy to have Jenn representing Fiscal Services.

**Classified Employee of the Year**

# EDUCATIONAL SERVICES *Division*

**Dr. Kristine Cvar, Assistant Superintendent**

## *Eva E. Ponce Vasquez*

Eva immigrated from Mexico as a child and, through perseverance and dedication, achieved her dream of working with children. A proud mother of two LMHS graduates in law enforcement and grandmother of six, she devoted 40 years to NLMUSD, serving early readers at Gardenhill, at-risk students, and district curriculum, assessment, and testing. We celebrate her remarkable service and wish her a well-deserved retirement.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# HUMAN RESOURCES
## *Division*

**Michael R. Gotto, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent**



### *Lizbeth Garcia*

Lizbeth exemplifies the heart of Human Resources. Lizbeth pairs deep institutional knowledge with unwavering positivity. Always approachable and genuinely helpful, Lizbeth supports colleagues with empathy and professionalism, strengthening culture, trust, and excellence in our Division. Her many years demonstrate her commitment to our community. We are so proud of Lizbeth!

**Classified Employee of the Year**

# MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS
## *Department*

**Gerald Mitchell, Director**

### *Alexandro M. Maldonado*

Alexandro Maldonado, “Alex,” is an outstanding District plumber in Maintenance. Kind, friendly, and highly knowledgeable, he works tirelessly to ensure students’ and staff needs are met. His dedication, professionalism, positive attitude, and reliability make Alex a shining example for Maintenance Employee of the Year.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS
# *Department - Grounds*

**Gerald Mitchell, Director**




**Classified Employee of the Year**

## *Daniel Ballejo*

Daniel Ballejo has served the district for years, most of them in the Grounds Department. Danny recently earned a well-deserved promotion to Grounds Foreperson. A trusted, safety-driven team player committed to outstanding campuses, Danny's leadership shines—earning Grounds Employee of the Year for an impressive third time!

# NUTRITION SERVICES
# *Department*

**Alexis Wahl, Director**

## *Angelina M. Morlet*

Angelina Morlet began with the district in 2018 as a Central Kitchen Warehouse Assistant and advanced to Central Kitchen Warehouse Lead in 2023. She manages an organized, clean, and efficient warehouse; willingly supports central kitchen operations; brings creativity and positivity to the workplace; and is a dependable team leader respected by her peers.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# SPECIAL EDUCATION *Department*

**Jim Wood, Executive Director**



**Teacher of the Year**

## *Rachel A. Streicker*

Ms. Streicker is a dedicated, supportive Orthopedic Impairment Specialist who ensures students have the adaptive equipment needed to access learning. Through collaboration with educators, service providers, families, and administrators, she supports transitions, safeguards equipment, and creates accountable systems so students receive consistent, equitable access across programs and sites with care.

## *Lisa F. Aguilar*

Lisa Aguilar stands as a cornerstone within the Special Education Department. Her unwavering efficiency streamlines complex processes, while her dedication to students inspires colleagues daily. With a positive attitude that transforms challenges into opportunities, Lisa's exceptional contributions make her truly invaluable to the team and the families they serve.




**Classified Employee of the Year**

# SCHOOL SAFETY *Department*

**Adrian Valdez, Chief**



## *Steve Salcedo*

Officer Salcedo has been instrumental in meeting the department's needs during staffing shortages. He has gone above and beyond to ensure continuity in coverage. He continuously helps peers with assignments and guidance.

**Classified Employee of the Year**

# Student Support *Services*

**Christopher Moton, Director**

## *Maria Judy Gomez*

Judy Gomez exemplifies excellence as the Secretary of the Student and Family Services department, consistently demonstrating professionalism, precision, and dedication. She streamlines operations, supports colleagues with warmth, and anticipates needs before they arise. Judy's reliability, integrity, and positive attitude elevate our workplace and make her truly deserving of this honor.



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATION *Program*

**Brandelia Marquez, Interim Coordinator**



**Classified Employee of the Year**

## *Incoronata "Tella" Zuaglietta*

With nearly three and a half years of dedicated service, Ms. Quaglietta has excelled as Secretary for SACC/ELOP. She is driven by a welcoming, supportive community and through her support of program staff and families, remains committed to guiding, motivating, and empowering students through meaningful experiences, daily learning, and shared success for today and tomorrow.

# TECHNOLOGY SERVICES *Department*

**Andrew Rutz, Chief Technology Officer**

## *Joshua C. Zeigler*

Joshua Zeigler consistently demonstrates exceptional technical skills, professionalism, and genuine care for others. Known for his personable approach and expertise—he builds strong relationships, supports district wide needs, and willingly goes above and beyond. His collaboration, reliability, and service mindset make him truly deserving of Employee of the Year.




**Classified Employee of the Year**

# TRANSPORTATION
# *Department*

**Ryan Nguyen, Director**



## *Apolonia Garcia*

Apple is a professional and caring NLM school bus driver who ensures students always feel safe and respected. Beyond the wheel, she leads the Transportation Sunshine Committee, coordinating memorable holiday celebrations and monthly team-building events strengthening morale, connection and a positive workplace. It is a privilege to work together!

**Classified Employee of the Year**

# CONFIDENTIAL EMPLOYEE
# *District Office*

**Michael R. Gotto, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent**

## *Jayda V. Lopez*

Jayda Lopez exemplifies dedication to the district through exceptional service, professionalism, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. As Administrative Assistant II, she is a trusted, knowledgeable resource for employees across the district, consistently going above and beyond to assist anyone in need. Congratulations to Jayda, Confidential Employee of the Year!



**Classified Employee of the Year**

# HONORING OUR *Retirees*



Corina Anguiano



Rosa Barragan



Michelle Centeno



Allyson Citizen



Djalma Oliveira



Deborah Fort

# HONORING OUR *Retirees*



Rita Gandhi



Amelia Garcia



Silvia Garcia



Christina McKenna



Eva E. Ponce Vasquez



Enrique Ramirez

# HONORING OUR *Retirees*



Melissa Smith



Alvaro Vanzzini

## Not Pictured

Cesar Arevalo Larin
Bizhan Assadian
Pauline Claborn
Thomas Grueser
Ana Jure
Anita Leon
George Luna
Iliana Martinez
Carolina Oropeza
Javier Reyes
Drew Rhoads
John Riley
Diane Simpson
Lucia Villegas
Wendie Wall

*Congratulations to all of our award recipients at the 2026 STAR Awards! Your hard work, dedication, and lasting impact on our students and families are truly inspiring and greatly appreciated.*

*A special thank you to our generous sponsors for their support and to all of our amazing staff who helped make this event possible. To our wonderful retirees, we wish you all of life's blessings as you take this next step in your journey.*

*Thank you to all who attended to make this celebration a success.*

**#NLMPRIDE**

*Every Student.*
*Future Ready.*
*Our Promise!*

# HONORING OUR *Retirees*



MSgt Steven Allard



Mirna Ambriz



Sharlene Bang



Tracy Bassaj



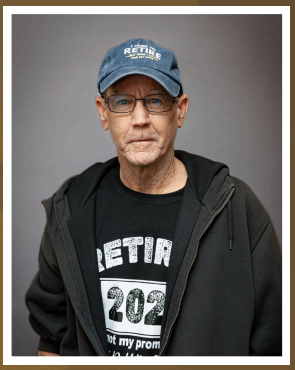
Sharmayn Beaton



Kathleen A. Canham



Ernesto Centeno



John K. Clausson



Marisol Garcia De Ruiz

# HONORING OUR *Retirees*



Enrique Ramirez



Alvaro Vanzzini

## Not Pictured

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Bizhan Assadian
Pauline Claborn
Rita Gandhi
Thomas Grueser
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KEEP THIS PAGE FOR THE STAR AWARD WITH NO PHOTO

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