



PRESS RELEASE

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Poway Unified Announces the Selection of Three District Teachers of the Year *Mike Bird, Stephanie Martin, and Crystal Ochoa Receive Honors*

Mike Bird

HS Geoscience & HS Physics, Mt. Carmel High School

After 25 years in teaching, Mike Bird feels his greatest accomplishments in education come in the form of notes, written by students reflecting on his "kindness, respect, and big heart." "Each day I try to bring a passion, love, and enthusiasm into the classroom about my subject matter that hopefully, somehow rubs off on my students," says Bird. "If my students leave my classroom at the end of the year with a greater appreciation of the world around them and how it works, I feel that I have fulfilled my purpose as an educator."

In his Geoscience and Physics classroom at Mt. Carmel High School, Mike encourages his students to "discover" answers by thinking through problems, trial and error, questioning, and spending time in research and collaboration. This process of discovery takes on different forms including computer programs that allow students to visualize certain events, gather data, and then use that data to reach conclusions about scientific concepts and principles. Students in Mike's classroom also engage in a great deal of hands-on learning. "Whether it is teaching the rock cycle to a Geoscience class through the use of melted Starburst Candy, or teaching about flotation and Archimedes' Principle to a Physics class through the famous Physics Boat Project, students are becoming more connected with science and the world around them."

In addition to teaching, Mike has coached boys and girls volleyball at the middle, high school, , and club volleyball levels for 25 years, with several of his former players going on to play in college, to compete in the Olympics, and become coaches themselves. His love, concern and passion for educating students in the classroom and on the court have created a legacy of students and student athletes continuously returning and reaching out to Mr. Bird to express their gratitude for his guidance. . "Their 'thank you' lets me know I made a difference in kids' lives. So simple, yet so profound."

Stephanie Martin

Transitional Kindergarten, Willow Grove Elementary School

Every student comes to school with individual needs – some are obvious, but others lie deep within and too often go undetected. These are the needs that speak directly to Stephanie Martin, who credits her fifth grade teacher with inspiring her. Struggling with difficult home life as a child, , Stephanie attended school for many years "under the radar" until her fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Peters, noticed changes in Stephanie's appearance and behavior and responded by showing up at softball practices, attending the school's ice cream socials with her, and encouraging Stephanie to try out for the school play. "For the first time in my life," says Stephanie, "I had consistent love and an adult who believed in me. Her love unlocked the potential I had within myself."

Throughout her twenty year career as a teacher, these childhood experiences have grounded Stephanie: "While I can teach the standards, my greatest accomplishment is that I bring out the best in my students because I understand the importance of meeting their academic and social-emotional needs equally." Her classroom practice balances instruction in emotional and intelligence quotients (EQ and IQ) and teaches students they must recognize emotions in themselves in order to manage them and be able to learn in a meaningful, successful way.

A passionate advocate for Transitional Kindergarten, Stephanie has created and piloted a number of benchmarks, rubrics and programs for Transitional Kindergarten, combining Common Core State Standards instructions alongside programs to develop social awareness, communication, and problem solving.

Active at her site and throughout the District on a wide range of committees, Stephanie also serves as Elementary Vice President of the Poway Federation of Teachers.

One-on-one connection with her students and positively impacting their lives are the keys to her own and her students' successes. "I want my students to know that their circumstances do not define them, and that they have someone who believes in them and values them every day at school."

Crystal Ochoa

K-5 Resource Specialist, Sunset Hills Elementary School

Crystal Ochoa describes her long-ago dream to become a lawyer as, "I wanted to be a voice for the voiceless." Crystal's career dreams changed in high school when she met a hearing-impaired student and began volunteering in the Life Skills classroom on her campus. "These students needed a champion and I wanted to be that champion." After graduating from college with honors as a single mom of a three-year-old she knew she wanted to focus her career on helping children recognize and strive to meet their potential.

When Crystal arrived at Sunset Hills Elementary School 15 years ago, she was tasked with educating - staff, students, and parents about what a successful Resource Program can and should be. "My open door classroom policy lends itself to establishing trust and effective lines of communication with both parents and teachers," she explains. "I also lead training sessions with the Instructional Assistants in how to best meet the needs of our Special Education students."

Recognizing that some Special Education students were not receiving Common Core-aligned math instruction, Crystal researched and compiled relevant materials and created binders for Special Education teachers. She also leads CHAMPS instruction (a positive behavior and interventions support system) for interested teachers at her site, believing that "this innovation will translate to a better management system in general education, as well as a consistency of expectations across the school campus."

Crystal explains, "I have worked with each student to not only ensure that they have basic skills, but also goal setting, perseverance, and a confidence in their ability to achieve. When I reflect back on my [fifteen] years of teaching, my thoughts immediately go back to the students who were identified as having big roadblocks in their learning and now pursuing their dreams. All students can and will learn."

This is a list of all PUSD 2014-2015 school site Teachers of the Year. All of these finalists are outstanding candidates, representative of the high caliber of professionalism and commitment that is characteristic of Poway Unified School District teachers.

Name	Site	Grade/Subject
Mike Bird	Mt. Carmel High School	HS Geoscience & HS Physics
Margaret Boyd	Adobe Bluffs Elementary School	Transitional Kindergarten
Deb Brennan	Morning Creek Elementary School	1st Grade
Laurie Brennan	Westwood Elementary School	3rd Grade
Rebecca Bronson	Deer Canyon Elementary School	1st Grade
Karen Bungard	Bernardo Heights Middle School	8th Grade Humanities
Kriscia Cabral	Highland Ranch Elementary School	4th/ 5th Grade
Norma Carter	Tierra Bonita Elementary School	4th/5th Grade
Phyllis Comer	Alternative Programs Department	Education Specialist K-8
Kristina Hankins	Stone Ranch Elementary School	Kindergarten
Joe Ismay	Meadowbrook Middle School	6-8 Electives
Rick Jordan	Westview High School	ROTC
Sabrina Kastrup	Turtleback Elementary School	5th Grade
Michelle Kihm-Doyle	Oak Valley Middle School	6th Grade Humanities
Cheryl Kuptz	Del Norte High School	Art
Kerri Kutzner	Los Penasquitos Elementary School	4th /5th Grade
Keith Leighton	Abraxas High School	Special Education
Teresa Lerma	Pomerado Elementary School	K/1st Grade
Eric March	Black Mountain Middle School	6th Grade Humanities
Stephanie Martin	Willow Grove Elementary School	Transitional Kindergarten
Bruce May	Twin Peaks Middle School	8th/Physical Science
Kathleen McKenna	Garden Road Elementary School	ASD Preschool
Katie McMillan	Poway High School	10th & 11th Grade English
A. Lee Moeser	Chaparral Elementary School	5th Grade
Angie Nellos	Rancho Bernardo High School	Math
Debra Norris	Shoal Creek Elementary School	K/1st Grade
Nancy Nowak	Del Sur Elementary School	1st/ 2nd Grade
Crystal Ochoa	Sunset Hills Elementary School	K-5 Resource Specialist
Melissa Orellana	Valley Elementary School	3rd Grade
Debbie Rosenberger	Sundance Elementary School	Transitional Kindergarten
Julie Schindler-Carroll	Monterey Ridge Elementary School	NSH 2nd/3rd
Amber Schulman	Creekside Elementary School	4th Grade
Jacquelyn Uriell	Career, Technical & Adult Ed Department	ESL Teacher
Liz Williams	Mesa Verde Middle School	7th /8th Grade Math

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