



PRESS RELEASE

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Poway Unified Announces the Selection of Three District Teachers of the Year *Heather Smith, Kerry Araiza, and Jay Posteraro* Receive Honors

Heather Smith

Pre-kindergarten Teacher, Willow Grove Elementary School

Heather started her career as a Head Start teacher in Washington State. She moved to Colorado where she was a children's counselor at a rehabilitation center, a kindergarten teacher, and curriculum coordinator. With this valuable experience she started her career at Poway Unified where she has been a pre-kindergarten teacher for the last nine years at Sunset Hills and Willow Grove Elementary Schools.

The inspiration for Heather to become a teacher came from her own experience as a preschooler confined to a wheelchair because of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Her teacher, Ms. Hill, made her feel loved and important. "She would lift me out of my chair and sit on the rug with me, talking to me, and teaching me in a way that made me forget about my disability." It was this experience that drove Heather to provide the same experience for the children she works with. It is the passion to provide her students with the same support and encouragement she received from Ms. Hill that inspires her teaching.

Four years ago Heather was invited to be part of a national research project piloting a new math curriculum for preschool. Implementing this program has shown her the importance of a student's first experience with math, and how that experience impacts the rest of their development. This has also led to Heather mentoring new preschool teachers in both math and writing methodologies. Her interactive group writing lessons were recognized last November at the Poway Unified School Board meeting showcasing innovative preschool programs within PUSD.

Heather's commitment to her community goes beyond her job. She continues to work with the Lupus and Rheumatoid Arthritis Foundation helping to raise money to fight the disease she dealt with as a child. In addition to her own children, Heather and her husband have taken in three teens that were displaced from broken homes. They have since transitioned successfully into adulthood but still remain a part of their lives.

Kerry Araiza

Second Grade Teacher, Pomerado Elementary School

Nine years ago, Kerry came to Poway Unified with extensive experience from Temecula as an expert in classroom management, English/language arts curriculum, and bilingual education. Since coming to Poway Unified School District ten years ago, she taught history/English at Meadowbrook Middle School, then at Pomerado Elementary School for the last three years as a first and second grade teacher. Her varied experience has given her a valuable perspective on education. Hearing

from former students about what they have done and accomplished in their lives is what Kerry describes as a “full circle moment for me.”

It was Kerry's desire to take on new challenges that led her to transfer to elementary school for work with first and second graders. She wanted to try out new curriculum and methodologies she had learned through various professional developments in reading and writing. This was not an easy decision to make at this point in her career, but one that excited and challenged her professionally.

It is Kerry's desire to continually learn new ideas and methodologies that led her to work with Scholastic, an educational literacy company designed for educators, as part of their National Advisory Board and Learning to Read Advisory Panel. She has helped Scholastic improve their website to better serve teachers and parents. Her association with Scholastic has resulted in receiving a grant for a set of iPads for her classroom. She has sought out training in how to leverage this tool instructionally with her students, opening the door to a variety of ways to more actively engage her students in their learning.

Most of all, she has fun with her students. “I laugh, sing, dance, do yoga, and even speak in funny accents in class. I will do whatever it takes to make learning fun and engaging. I want my students to be inspired and to be curious about the work around them. I want them to feel successful, to set goals, to organize their learning, and reach for their dreams.”

Jay Posteraro

Music Teacher, Mesa Verde Middle School

Anyone who has been around Jay understands immediately why students find him so enthusiastic and energetic. His ability to inspire and engage students is obvious. Jay was inspired by his high school band teacher who taught him “never to settle for good when you could be great.” Jay creates the same expectation for the student in his program. His principal, Cliff Mitchell, says, “To me, Jay is what teaching is all about. I don't know how he meets the needs of each one of the 70 plus kids in his classes, but he does.”

Jay has taught at Mesa Verde Middle School for his entire 19-year career. He says he has taught close to “3,500 young musicians” in his tenure. He still gets calls from many of these students well beyond their college years and has been asked to play at many of their weddings. These kinds of relationship with his students and their families are what Jay treasures.

Back in 2011, the Mesa Verde band was invited to participate in the Heritage Festival of Gold, a prestigious national band competition. After accepting this invitation, he learned they were the only middle school invited to a competition with high school bands. What happened then was truly amazing. The students received the highest overall score in this competition and were invited to play at the encore concert at Chicago Symphony Hall. After their performance in front of the other festival performers, they were given a standing ovation. When they returned home to San Diego, they were greeted by family and news media. The city of San Diego had a day named in their honor. Jay said, “It was the crowning moment of my teaching career.”

Beyond his work with the Mesa Verde music program, Jay performs in numerous musical groups throughout San Diego. He is the Pep Band Director for the University of San Diego, coordinates an annual summer music program that is open to anyone in San Diego County, and is a judge for numerous band and orchestra competitions throughout Southern California.

This is a list of all PUSD 2013-2014 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. The Selection Committee was made up of **Anthony Bayro**, Los Peñasquitos Elementary School; **David Hall**, Personnel Support Services; **Doug Johnson**, Del Sur Elementary School; **Keith Koelzer**, Del Norte High School; **Megan Power**, Del Sur Elementary School; and **Martin Reisert**, Oak Valley Middle School.

Name	Site	Grade/Subject
Renee Tompkins	Abraxas High School	Transition Speech Pathologist
Esther Hilleli	Adobe Bluffs Elementary School	Kindergarten/1 st Grade ASD
Dorothy Long	Alternative Programs Department	6 th - 12 th Grades Multiple Subjects
Meera Navarro	Bernardo Heights Middle School	8 th Grade Core Humanities/ASB Advisor
Vickie Carroll	Black Mountain Middle School	Humanities/ELL/AVID
Virginia Seawright	Chaparral Elementary School	5 th Grade
Guy Miller	Creekside Elementary School	3 rd Grade
Julie Simms	Deer Canyon Elementary School	5 th Grade
Allison Raczka	Del Norte High School	9 th - 12 th Grades ASB Director
Karen Garrett	Del Sur Elementary School	Transitional Kindergarten
Christy Balun	Garden Road Elementary School	K-5 Resource (RSP)
Diana Clark	Highland Ranch Elementary School	Resource
Amber Salcido	Los Peñasquitos Elementary School	Kindergarten
Cynthia Arrellano	Meadowbrook Middle School	7 th Grade Language Arts/7 th Grade AVID/ 6 th - 8 th Grades Dual Language
Jay Posteraro	Mesa Verde Middle School	6 th - 8 th Grades Music
Leslie Von Derhaar	Monterey Ridge Elementary School	Kindergarten/1 st Grade SDC-NSH
Casey Rozzell	Morning Creek Elementary School	3 rd Grade
Gary Jolk	Mt. Carmel High School	9 th - 12 th Grades Health Science/Physical Education
Kyle Asmus	Oak Valley Middle School	8 th Grade Science
Kerry Araiza	Pomerado Elementary School	2 nd Grade
Katherine Powell	Poway High School	Librarian
Yvonne Eibeck	Rancho Bernardo High School	Physics
Judy Kozak	Shoal Creek Elementary School	Grades 2/3
Kendra Jones	Stone Ranch Elementary School	Grades 4/5 Combo
Emily McMullan	Sundance Elementary School	Elementary Resource
Phuong Hoang	Sunset Hills Elementary School	3 rd Grade
Karen Ogden	Tierra Bonita Elementary School	3 rd Grade
Jacqueline Dastrup	Turtleback Elementary School	1 st Grade
Jeff Lannen	Twin Peaks Middle School	8 th Grade Mathematics
Gale Caddell	Valley Elementary School	Kindergarten
Kelly Xitco	Westview High School	Resource Specialist/Science
Thy Dinh	Westwood Elementary School	4 th Grade
Heather Smith	Willow Grove Elementary School	Pre-Kindergarten

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