



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Poway Unified Announces the Selection of Three 2019 District Teachers of the Year**

*Stephen Whittaker, Coleen Montgomery, and Sarah McCracken  
Receive District Honors*

The Poway Unified School District is proud to announce Stephen Whittaker, Coleen Montgomery, and Sarah McCracken as the three 2019 District Teachers of the Year. These teachers received surprise visits at their schools this morning.

A committee of District and site representatives selected the three PUSD Teachers of the Year based on criteria which included: innovations inside the classroom, contributions to their schools and the District, and commitment to their students. The San Diego County Office of Education also sponsors a Teacher of the Year Recognition Program, honoring teachers from all of San Diego County. All three PUSD Teachers of the Year will be submitted for consideration for County Teacher of the Year.



### **Stephen Whittaker, Oak Valley Middle School**

Stephen is not only a Math, Science, and Special Education teacher at Oak Valley Middle School, he is also the Special Education Representative for the District Committee to pilot and adopt new Middle School Science curriculum, and the Teacher Representative for the OVMS Falcons Foundation (serving as a liaison for teachers requesting financial backing for new and innovative projects). Stephen is no stranger to new and innovative projects, having developed several successful programs of his own.

While working in a classroom for students with moderate to severe needs, he developed and adapted lessons to include and require the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices, thus allowing his students without the ability to verbally communicate at all to finally have a voice in class lessons. As the students progressed, their ability to communicate outside of scripted lessons increased substantially, allowing them to begin accessing their environment without the tether of an adult who attempted to anticipate their needs.

Driven to broaden the impact of effective teaching for students with exceptional needs, Stephen began working with, and training, his fellow teachers so they could encourage students with exceptional needs to thrive in any setting. To accomplish this, he coordinated a team of special education service providers to create a needs-assessment for the teachers at Oak Valley. This helped them recognize the areas in which they could support teachers by providing them with skills and strategies they could use to support exceptional learners in their classrooms. Teachers are now reporting an increase in eagerness, competency, and confidence for working with students with exceptional needs.



**Coleen Montgomery**, Rancho Bernardo High School

Coleen is a high school English/AVID teacher, teaching a variety of classes – English, Honors Humanities, AVID, and Critical Study of Mass Media. Regardless of the class, she always starts her Mondays with a “Text-of-the-Week.” Students analyze texts such as a Nike commercial or political statements. They then identify the text’s message (summary) and the author’s techniques (strategy). Through this most basic of analyses, students learn that analysis skills are not just reserved for “old’ texts (books) and they appreciate the ways the curriculum is made relevant to their lives. Her students ultimately become savvy consumers of media so that they can thrive in a world where they are bombarded with different messaging.

Coleen's efforts to help students connect with one another led her to the Human Library – a world-wide movement that's "designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue." She has her students sit one on one across from each other and take turns being either the "Book" or the "Reader". "Books" tell their stories - their experiences - and then "Readers" have the opportunity to ask questions. Students truly engage with one another, have "a-ha" moments about their classmates' challenges, and reflect on their own biases.

Coleen's students valued this experience so much, they hosted a Human Library at Bernardo Heights Middle School and spent three class periods connecting with students and learning from each other. Through Coleen's efforts, students learn from one another's stories, feel valued and safe, and demonstrate respect for each other's differences.



**Sarah McCracken**, Midland Elementary School

Sarah is a second grade teacher and the school's GATE Coordinator. Wanting to go beyond giving GATE students additional "challenge" work, she helped to implement her school's GATE Educational Plans, similar to IEPs, working closely with the principal, counselor and each student's parents to brainstorm strengths, gather areas to grow, and set targeted, measurable goals for each year.

Sarah believes in Aristotle's quote, "Educating the mind without the heart is no education at all." She makes an effort, and takes pride in, knowing her students; greeting them, connecting with them, and engaging in their interests. She's learned that by teaching the heart, you can reach the mind. Sarah recently incorporated into her classroom the idea of blended learning with student choice. You can see this the moment you walk into her classroom. As part of the District's Voyager program, she has gained a depth of knowledge of how to establish a classroom environment that offers flexible seating, student choice, and technology tools to enhance learning and meaningful feedback.

During their independent time, students have a choice when it comes to their assignments. Their “playlist” allows them to accomplish pre-determined tasks and assignments that utilize various technology tools, as well as collaborative conversations with their peers. All of this provides Sarah with useful and meaningful feedback. After MAP testing, she sits down with each student and together they set goals for the next trimester. This process is now implemented school-wide and allows teachers to see the personalized success and confidence their students display when they reach their goals.

### **2019 Poway Unified Teachers of the Year**

This is a list of all PUSD 2019 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.

<b>Site</b>	<b>Name</b>
Adobe Bluffs	Kathleen Seckington
Abraxas	Robert Lutticken
Alternative Programs	Elizabeth (Betsy) Johnson
Bernardo Heights	Azza Ayouty
Black Mountain	Elaine Page
Chaparral	Denise Dwyer
Creekside	Karmyn Beireis
Career Technical & Adult Education	Ann Fisher
Deer Canyon	Leigh Fitzgerald
Del Norte	Courtney Craig
Del Sur	Margaret Bergamin
Garden Road	Jaclyn Vella
Highland Ranch	Lien Mai
Los Penasquitos	Margaret Kinsey
Meadowbrook	Anne Brady
Mesa Verde	Kristen Kennedy
Midland	Sarah McCracken
Monterey Ridge	Angela Atienza
Morning Creek	Christina Hall
Mt. Carmel	Megan Jones
Oak Valley	Stephen Whittaker
Pomerado	Brietta James
Poway	Dean Cortez
Rancho Bernardo	Coleen Montgomery
Rolling Hills	Kelly Coate

Shoal Creek  
Stone Ranch  
Sundance  
Sunset Hills  
Tierra Bonita  
Turtleback  
Twin Peaks  
Valley  
Westwood  
Westview  
Willow Grove

Lisa Ransom  
Jennifer Inzunza  
Jennifer Dodero  
Monda Forrestal  
Kristin Stowe  
Aaron Betschel  
Megan Andrade  
Lisa Jones  
Theresa Stogsdill  
My-Nga Ingram  
Melissa Cariss