



PRESS RELEASE

Poway Unified School District

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Poway Unified Announces 2021 ‘PUSD Teachers of the Year’

Tasha Giffin, Julie Spychalski, Carlos LaGrange Receive School District Honor

(San Diego, CA) – The Poway Unified School District (PUSD) is proud to announce that Tasha Giffin, Social Science Teacher at Del Norte High School, Julie Spychalski, Physical Education Teacher at Twin Peaks Middle School, and Carlos LaGrange, Resource Specialist at Westview High School have been chosen as the PUSD Teachers of the Year for 2021.

Tasha Giffin: Social Studies, Del Norte High School

Tasha is a National Board Certified educator who has taught in the Poway Unified School District for 25 years. Even while navigating teaching during a global pandemic, she has effectively engaged her students in ways that cultivate peer collaboration, promote active listening, and foster effective communication skills.

Tasha’s passion for equity led her to create a more culturally relevant classroom that celebrates diversity, culture and identity, in addition to launching the Del Norte Equity/Anti-Racism Task force. As the facilitator of this task force, which involves students, teachers, administrators and staff, Tasha has led 2-4 meetings per month since October 2020 and helped effect positive change in the overall campus culture. She has diversified her AP European History curriculum to include lessons that teach about marginalized groups, and strives to incorporate elements that provoke self-reflection.

Tasha is known to have an active presence on campus, having served as a faculty advisor in clubs and organizations such as Key Club, QuizBowl, the Class of 2021, and equity cohorts. In addition to utilizing virtual tools and hands-on methods to teach 150 students per trimester, Tasha says she values the importance of instilling joy in each lesson. She ensures that at least one aspect of her lesson brings her joy as the teacher, and brings her students joy as learners. Her dedication to students’ academic and social-emotional excellence is evident in all that she does, and is an outstanding representative for Del Norte High School, the District, and the teaching profession.



Tasha Giffin, Del Norte High School

Julie Spychalski, Physical Education, Twin Peaks Middle School

Julie's devotion to student and staff well-being is not limited to Physical Education, and shines through in both virtual and on-campus environments. She is known to actively change the school culture and climate no matter where she is, and has proven to be a supportive campus figure for students and staff.

In her four years at Twin Peaks Middle School, Julie has fostered students' social-emotional growth through sports leadership, re-written the Physical Education curriculum and led physical activity challenges that motivate the Twin Peaks community during emergency school closures. She is a member of several P.E. organizations nationwide, and shares the online curriculum she built for Twin Peaks with other P.E. teachers around the country. In addition to this, she is a member of SHAPE America, is a P.E. Leadership Academy graduate through the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE), and is the Governance Board representative and department head for P.E. and Electives.



Julie Spychalski, Twin Peaks Middle School

Julie says her greatest joy is seeing students develop confidence and self-esteem in a sport or activity that she introduced. She is a strong believer in the importance of teaching respect, responsibility, accountability, social responsibility and teamwork. Her efforts to create a fun environment for students and staff do not go unnoticed. Julie is a bright light on campus, and an asset to #TeamPUSD.

Carlos LaGrange, Resource Specialist, Westview High School

Carlos, who has taught in the Poway Unified School District for four years, is a Resource Specialist whose mission in teaching is to build relationships and model the communication and interpersonal skills that students will need to be successful in the future. He says this last year, being so uncertain with the global pandemic, has challenged him to cultivate the relationships that will withstand trials and an ever-changing learning landscape.

As a member of the Westview Equity Team, Carlos works to facilitate difficult conversations with staff and with students to reinforce the importance of inclusion on campus and in school curriculum. He is also a member of the PBIS team at Westview, a group of educators and administrators that strives to transition the school to a system of positive behavior interventions and restorative justice. Additionally, Carlos is the advisor for the student-led E-Sports club, where he encourages positive digital citizenship and healthy digital communication. Carlos works closely



Carlos LaGrange, Westview High School

in teams and partnerships throughout the school community to develop new methods and curriculum through the lens of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). He believes that regardless of content, a lesson is always made better when additional methods of instruction are added and when students are offered increased choices for demonstrating mastery.

Carlos is known to be a consistent, reliable source of encouragement on campus, and an essential member of the Westview community. Students, families and staff members alike see Carlos as an embodiment of the “Wolverine Way,” and an exceptional representation of what it means to be a student-centered teacher.

2021 Poway Unified School Site Teachers of the Year

Congratulations to all of our site certificated employees who represent the best of #TeamPUSD:

Abraxas High School	Dean Weese
Adobe Bluffs Elementary School	Nancy Cline
Alternative Programs	Kathryn Humberstone
Bernardo Heights Middle School	Leonora Persichina
Black Mountain Middle School	Erin Telles
Career Technical & Adult Education	Ross Kallen
Canyon View Elementary School	The Entire Teaching Staff
Chaparral Elementary School	Linda Ford
Creekside Elementary School	Parker Hensley
Deer Canyon Elementary School	The Entire Teaching Staff
Del Norte High School	Tasha Giffin*
Del Sur Elementary School	The Entire Teaching Staff
Design39 Campus	The Entire Teaching Staff
Garden Road Elementary School	Suzanne Urmaza
Highland Ranch Elementary School	Jennie Lee
Los Penasquitos Elementary School	The Entire Teaching Staff
Meadowbrook Middle School	Joe Gizzo
Mesa Verde Middle School	Caroline Cochran
Midland Elementary School	Megan Prickett
Monterey Ridge Elementary School	The Entire Teaching Staff
Morning Creek Elementary School	Shannon Carr
Mt. Carmel High School	Ashley Messur & Nicole Loumeau
Oak Valley Middle School	Alexander Buder
Pomerado Elementary School	Sarah Roddy
Poway High School	Rachel Banh
Rancho Bernardo High School	Leonie Maneevone
Rolling Hills Elementary School	Allison Bayshore
Shoal Creek Elementary School	Dana Mueller
Stone Ranch Elementary School	Liz Moyer
Sundance Elementary School	Cindy Peterson & Susie Buell
Sunset Hills Elementary School	The Entire Teaching Staff
Tierra Bonita Elementary School	Zoe Koller

Turtleback Elementary School
Twin Peaks Middle School
Valley Elementary School
Westview High School
Westwood Elementary School
Willow Grove Elementary School

Jodie Podeszwick
Julie Spychalski*
Tristie Graetz
Carlos LaGrange*
The Entire Teaching Staff
Rachael Roubitchek

**Indicates District Teacher of the Year*

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