

Madera County
Excellence in Education
Awards



September 26, 2024
Madera County Superintendent of Schools
Conference Center





Madera County

Excellence in Education

Proudly sponsored by

Elizabeth J. Dooley
President & CEO

Educational Employees Credit Union
and

Dr. Cecilia A. Massetti
Madera County Superintendent of Schools



Cecilia A. Massetti, Ed.D.

**Madera County Superintendent of Schools
Welcome as we celebrate eighteen years of
excellence! We award honors to
individuals who demonstrate their passion
and commitment to children and their
families in our schools. We celebrate the
accomplishments of educators from
throughout the county who make a
difference on a daily basis. We showcase**

**our honorees and the contributions they have made to
enhance the lives of children. Our honorees are often
“unsung heroes”. We shine a light on their achievements and
see how they inspire students. The Madera county
educational community is grateful to the Educational
Employees Credit Union Board of Directors, President and
CEO Elizabeth Dooley, and the EECU staff for their
commitment to honor educators and for their impact and
service. EECU is the sole sponsor of this elegant event. We
are fortunate to partner with an organization whose
dedication to our schools is genuine and whose helping hands
are felt in many ways.**



**Elizabeth J. Dooley
President & CEO**

**Educational Employees Credit Union
EECU is proud to sponsor the Madera
County Excellence in Education awards
program. Since 2007, EECU has partnered
with the Madera County Superintendent
of Schools to honor outstanding
individuals who demonstrate exemplary
commitment to their work. We extend our**

**sincere congratulations to all of this year’s nominees,
finalists, and winners. It is our privilege to celebrate the hard
-working teachers, administrators, and school employees
who make a difference in their schools and their communities
every day. We appreciate and respect their dedication to
educating their students and preparing them for a brighter
future.**

Program

Welcome

*Tricia Protzman
Deputy Superintendent
Madera County Superintendent of Schools
Master of Ceremonies*

Flag Salute

National Anthem

Priscilla Huerta

2023 Honorees

2024 Nominees and Finalists

Greetings

*Dr. Cecilia A. Massetti
Madera County Superintendent of Schools*

*Elizabeth J. Dooley
EECU President & CEO*

Presentation of Awards

Tricia Protzman

School Employee of the Year



*Elizabeth "Libby" Cross
Special Education
Instructional Aide
Chowchilla Union High
School District*

Libby holds a Bachelor of Arts in English with minor degrees in History and Music. Her educational career began in 1975 in Kentucky where she was a student teacher. In 1983, she graduated from seminary school and worked as a pastor in San Rafael, Antioch, and Chowchilla. It was in Chowchilla that she met her husband and began a family. Two of her children are on the Autistic Spectrum and one is hearing impaired. Her experience as a mother to children with special needs and her educational background provided her with a skill set not many have. In 1998, she began substitute

teaching for both special and regular education classrooms. Libby was a football mom, a band booster, and a seamstress who fitted the uniforms. In 2010, she began co-coaching the Academic Decathlon team. In 2013, she became the fulltime coach and was hired by Chowchilla Union High School District as a special education instructional aide. Under her guidance, Chowchilla won the countywide Academic Decathlon competition in 2016 and 2019. Her students commented, "Mrs. Cross is truly one of the most devoted, kind hearted advisors we've ever had. She always puts her students above herself." At 75, Libby shows no signs of slowing down. The pandemic brought many changes and she grew right along with them. She is currently assisting bilingual students. Even though she is not fluent in a second language, Libby is able to help her students succeed by finding ways to communicate with them through technology.

School Employee Nominees



Brian Bennett
*Head Custodian
Madera Unified
School District*



Beth Lawrence
*Library Media Specialist
Golden Valley Unified
School District*



Colleen Lehigh
*MOT Secretary
Bass Lake Joint Union
Elementary School District*



Brenda Plauston
*Senior Administrative
Assistant
Madera County
Superintendent of Schools*



Janice Reardon
*Secretary/Registrar
Chawanakee Unified
School District*



Stacey Velazquez
*Registrar/Secretary
Yosemite Unified
School District*



Nicole Wilson
*Administrative Assistant
Educational Services
Chowchilla Elementary
School District*

Administrator of the Year



*Leonard Perez
Principal
Madera Unified
School District*

Leonard's career with Madera Unified School District began in 2004 as a multiple subject teacher. He moved on to district academic coach, then vice-principal, and currently serves as the principal at James Monroe Elementary. Under Leonard's leadership, student achievement has improved and Monroe students are outperforming all schools in Madera Unified. For staff, Leonard models professionalism and respect. For students, he ensures staff are supporting student academic requirements, as well as their physical, social, and emotional needs. He has developed a positive school climate that is student-centered and focused on meeting the varying needs of all students. Leonard believes in working collaboratively, setting high goals and expectations for students, and in striving to make continuous improvement. He is driven to assist his community. He has partnered with local agencies and political figures to support his students and their families through community centered activities such as clothing and food drives, as well as Christmas gifts for students. He advocates for his bilingual and multilingual students, believing that they bring with them a wealth of knowledge and skills. "My stance is that being bilingual or multilingual can open so many doors of opportunity."

Administrator Nominees



Karla Ceballos-Lopez
*Director of Student and
Educational Services
Chowchilla Union High
School District*



Kristi DeBernardi
*Principal
Chawanakee Unified
School District*



Dyann Eckstein
*Nutrition Services
Manager
Yosemite Unified
School District*



Samantha Lee
*School Psychologist
Golden Valley Unified
School District*



Sarah Sheridan
*Expanded Learning
Opportunity Program
Coordinator
Chowchilla Elementary
School District*



Michelle Townsend
*Director of Special
Programs & Products
Bass Lake Joint Union
Elementary School
Districts*

Teacher of the Year



Megan Williams
Teacher
Chowchilla Elementary
School District

Megan has taught a Special Day Class for grades TK - 1st at Fuller Elementary School since 2017. She helps her students work toward grade level standards using a multitude of accommodations such as visual icons, fidgets, timers, communication devices, and much more. She feels social-emotional learning curriculum equips students with the necessary skills to navigate their emotions, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. Megan works with outside agencies to promote meaningful connections between the classroom and the community and enriches the educational experience for students with disabilities. She believes STEM education is crucial for young students and works with Fresno State's Physics Outreach Program to provide engaging activities and hands-on experiments for all Fuller students. Her aggressive early intervention approach has procured her the nickname, "The Exiter." Her methods have allowed students to exit special education services within a few years. While her students academic successes are commendable, it is the emotional ground work she accomplishes with her students that sets her apart. Parent Maria Diaz noted, "Mrs. Williams gave my son more than an education. She gave him a voice. She gave him worth. She saw him and all of his abilities. She loved him, challenged him, and helped him grow. She learned his language and bonded with him in so many ways." Megan is a special educator who understands the effect her work has on the lives of children. She is an active member of the Chowchilla Elementary School District family who strives for the best outcomes of all her students.

Teacher Nominees



Katie Bethune
Teacher
Chawanakee Unified
School District



Erin Dahlem
Teacher
Golden Valley Unified
School District



Jaimie Dorado
Teacher
Madera Unified
School District



Debra Haworth
Teacher
Madera County
Superintendent of Schools



Kim Kutzner
Teacher
Chowchilla Union High
School District



Brandon Matthews
Teacher
Yosemite Unified
School District



Tami Rose
Teacher
Bass Lake Joint Union
Elementary School District

Selection Committee



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Connie Moreno-Peraza, Rosalba Serrano-Rivera,
Karan Long, Stell Manfredi,
& Chief Gino Chiaramonte*

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Dr. Rosemary Morales, & Brenda Plauson*

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Kristi Winter

Special Thanks

Tricia Protzman

Leo Martin, Elegant Occasions

Pardini's

Photography by MJD

Priscilla Huerta

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