The Arizona Education Association and the AEA Foundation for Teaching & Learning are honored to introduce the AEA members and Community Partners recognized for their accomplishments in Arizona public schools. Our Salute to Excellence transcends an awards program by honoring those extraordinary individuals who dedicate their talents to serving public education in Arizona.

Sometimes we take the excellence and dedication we see in our colleagues for granted. We just assume they know how important they are. AEA’s awards program is a way to remind ourselves – and our honorees – how valuable they are and the work they do. We want them to know, without a doubt, that we appreciate all their efforts. We want to encourage them to continue their good work and to remind ourselves of the nobility and importance of our own efforts on behalf Arizona’s students and our profession.

We thank our Education Awards Sponsor, California Casualty, for their generosity in making certain that our 2021 recipients are honored in a way befitting of their extraordinary work.

During these challenging times, we must celebrate the exceptional work that our colleagues achieve every day and the incredible support from our community partners. Join me in congratulating the recipients honored during this year’s Salute to Excellence Celebration.

Warmest regards,

Marisol Garcia
President, AEA Foundation for Teaching & Learning
Vice President, Arizona Education Association
Christa McAuliffe
“I Touch the Future, I Teach” Award

Christa McAuliffe was a “practical visionary” who reached for the stars. Since her tragic death in the Challenger crash in 1986, the phrase she coined to describe her profession – “I touch the future, I teach” – lives on in our hearts, inspiring us to give our best. The award AEA named after Christa McAuliffe goes each year to a teacher like Christa, who inspired those around her, had a sense of humor and optimism, and nurtured curiosity and hope in children.

Kelley Fisher
Deer Valley Education Association

The 2021 Christa McAuliffe award recipient is Kelley Fisher, a National Board Certified Kindergarten teacher at Las Brisas Elementary School in the Deer Valley Unified School District. Kelley Fisher makes us proud to be an educator because “she sacrifices all that she has for her students.”

At Las Brisas, Kelley has made her classroom an excellent place for learning. Kelley’s Kindergarten classroom reflects her love for teaching and her personality. From her many pictures of flamingoes to her Arizona Diamondback bobblehead collection, Kelley’s students know that her classroom is a place where she cares about them and wants them to know about her. Parents in the community will specifically request Kelley as their child’s Kindergarten teacher as word of her excellence in education is well-known throughout the community.

Kelley cares for her fellow educators and the community by organizing fundraising events for those in need. When a colleague was injured during the Las Vegas Music Festival shooting incident, Kelley organized community and school events to help the family with medical bills and financial support. For years, Kelley has participated in the Three-Day Walk for Breast Cancer Awareness and was the captain of her walking team.

Kelley’s holds multiple leadership positions in the Deer Valley Education Association. She has led organizing efforts to bring attention to employee concerns and spearheaded membership drives. Kelley is also a driving force behind the Red for Ed movement and an integral part of the Arizona Educators United group. She continues to advocate for teachers and students at the state level as a Region 4 Director on the AEA Board of Directors. Kelley is always putting the well-being of students and staff at the forefront of all her decisions.

Kelley is passionate, caring and committed to public education. She puts her heart and soul into everything she does for students and public education. She lives the personal characteristics of Christa McAuliffe each and every day and inspires us all to do better, be better.

Congratulations Kelley Fisher, the 2021 AEA Christa McAuliffe award recipient!
ESPecially for Kids

AEA honors an exceptional education support professional with the “ESPecially for Kids” Award, which recognizes a classified employee for “extraordinary efforts on behalf of young people.”

Todd Autenreith
Flowing Wells Education Association

The 2021 ESPECially for Kids award recipient is Todd Autenreith, Flowing Wells Education Association. Todd is the model for all public school employees. After retiring from an extensive teaching career in elementary and middle schools, Todd returned to Flowing Wells as a computer lab technician. Throughout 2020 and 2021, Todd faced the challenges of new technology and a dependence on remote learning with a growth mindset and positive attitude.

Todd has built many personal relationships with our Governing Board members to ensure a positive and productive school climate for all school members. He leads by example as he models how school employees can become active members of the Association and serve our students and the community daily. He celebrates all employee successes and accomplishments and is always seen as a positive resource.

Todd has spent his entire career as a leader with two specific passions - an advocate for literacy and athletics. After serving as a wrestling coach for nearly 30 years, Todd continues to help with wrestling tournaments as an announcer and advocate for school athletics. He participates in the Love of Reading events in the district and eagerly practices reading with all students in his computer lab. He sees that students can learn perseverance and adaptability on the wrestling mat just as they can in reading.

Congratulations Todd Autenreith, the 2021 ESPECially for Kids award recipient!
Human and Civil Rights Award

The AEA Human and Civil Rights Award recognizes an individual who demonstrates support of public education, promotes diversity in Association leadership, or leads in the quest for improved human relations and civil rights.

Chef Silvana Salcido Esparza
Nominated by Jay Barbuto, Phoenix Elementary Classroom Teachers Association

Silvana Salcido Esparza is a baker’s daughter, an activist, and a chef. She comes from a long line of cooks and bakers and was trained by her grandmother and parents, in business and in the kitchen. Chef Silvana creates award-winning food in Phoenix restaurants, where she is celebrated for her contributions to the city’s vibrant profile. Her food has been featured in Esquire Magazine and on Food Network’s Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives.

While Chef Silvana’s culinary expertise has earned her plenty of accolades, she is also a successful businesswoman and a promoter of the arts. Chef Silvana advises and mentors young chefs-in-training and has been an outspoken civil rights advocate. As a citizen of both the United States and Mexico, she feels a personal responsibility to elevate popular perceptions of Mexican American culture.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chef Silvana and the Barrio Café donated more than 500 meals to families of Thomas A. Edison School in the Phoenix Elementary School District when grocery store shelves were empty, and the school district was struggling to provide meals. Despite hardships caused by the pandemic in her own business, Chef Silvana chose to give to the communities in need by proving a meal, some hope, and a smile.

In 2020, Chef Silvana and the Barrio Café were at the forefront of small businesses that supported Proposition 208 publicly. Opponents of Proposition 208 cited “crippling impacts to small businesses” if Proposition 208 were to pass, however having Chef Silvana speak out as a small business owner in support of the Proposition allowed for the public to be more receptive to the initiative.

Because of the leadership, courage, and generosity that Chef Silvana demonstrated, we proudly bestow her with the 2021 AEA Human and Civil Rights award.
Julie Horwin is a force of nature! When Julie encounters a challenge or problem, instead of spending valuable time complaining, she immediately starts to problem solve and always develops solutions that work.

Julie had noted a distinct lack of Progressive candidates running for office at the local, state and national levels in Arizona. To address the situation, Julie designed and implemented a candidate training program, through Leading for Change, to expertly prepare potential candidates to run for office. Her success is unquestionable, as she is personally responsible for recruiting, training, and helping to elect at least 30 members of the Arizona state legislature over the past 10 years. Additionally, she has trained and helped to elect numerous school board candidates, city council candidates, and other candidates.

Anyone who is fortunate enough to know Julie, knows that she is a dynamo who is constantly working to improve life for retirees, students, and education employees. Whether she is hauling away trash at a Red for Ed rally, delivering water bottles to support the thousands of participants at the rally, training candidates and campaign volunteers/workers or creatively breaking fundraising records, Julie pours her whole heart and soul into every task.

Julie is AEA-Retired’s resident techie and is solely responsible for moving our Association into the 21st century with E-Newsletters, Robo Calls, and Zoom meetings. When the Covid-19 pandemic developed, Julie figured out a way to hold a successful AEA-Retired Annual Meeting virtually with more than 125 members in attendance.

Julie Horwin is the epitome of all the attributes that are associated with the Les Reynolds Distinguished Senior Service Award, and she richly deserves to be named the 2021 recipient.
Nell Wilcoxen Future Educator Scholarship

This scholarship is offered to an AEA member or their immediate family who plans to pursue a career as an educator. Scholarships are utilized for accredited college or university coursework.

Elysia Jane Carreon
Independence High School
Daughter of Estevan Carreon, Glendale Union Education Association

Jane Carreon, daughter of AEA member Estevan Carreon, will be an Independence High School Class of 2021 graduate. She plans to attend Northern Arizona University and major in Music for secondary education.

Jane grew up in a household surrounded by educators - her dad and tio were teachers, and both grandmas were education support professionals. Unlike most children, she got to see the inner workings of class preparation, teachers’ unions, and how teachers live outside of school on a near daily basis. She found it fascinating and inspiring. Being surrounded by educators taught her to not only love school but to be a lifelong learner.

When she joined the high school’s National Honor Society (NHS) club, she was required to do ten hours of formal tutoring each semester. She continued to help her friends with schoolwork, but now every Tuesday and Thursday morning before school began, she tutored students on math and history. She loved it. It was an incredibly rewarding experience, and she was delighted that her work helped others be successful in school.

Teaching has always been a part of her life and family history, and she found that teaching is something she enjoyed and was surprisingly good at. Music and choir were also her passion. She found she could bring both her passions together for her future. Thanks to her family, she understands that learning and teaching are one and the same, and both are equally rewarding opportunities.

Her answer to why she wants to be a teacher is quite simple, “I love to learn, but more than that, I love to teach.”
Jesus Anthony Lovio
ESP Member, Flowing Wells Education Association

Anthony Lovio is an Education Support Professional in the Flowing Wells Unified School District. He is a classroom assistant. He attends Prescott College, majoring in Special Education.

Anthony wants to become a certified teacher because he has a genuine love for special education and public education. He knows that everything he does will have a lasting impact on the students. Throughout his educational career, he had teachers whose actions still wander the halls of his memory. He may not remember their math lesson, but he does remember their compassion and understanding for a student who was willing to learn.

Anthony had a US History teacher and Academic Decathlon coach write, “Keep carrying the fire” in his yearbook. That comment from his mentor was a tremendous inspiration. He now proudly displays that phrase in his own classroom as a reminder to himself and his students. He wants his students to know that no matter what happens in life, no matter how difficult that specific moment may be, there are better days ahead.

Working in a low-income school, he sees how poverty directly affects a student’s success in the classroom whether that is not having access to the proper materials or not having a clean mask to wear. He wants to help and support all students. He believes that no student is unteachable, and no special education student needs to be “fixed.”

Anthony wants to inspire and empower his students to be the best version of themselves. He hopes that one day his students will look back and tell their own children to “Keep carrying the fire.”
Chauna Fuell and Bradley Gossett

Flowing Wells Education Association

Nature and Gardening Project

The 2021 Learning Improvement through Faculty Teams (LIFT) grant recipients are Chauna Fuell and Bradley Gossett for the Nature and Gardening Project.

By caring for plants and chickens, Laguna Elementary students will be able to see and understand another life form. In science, plants and chickens fit right into our science life forms units. The students will learn about life cycles — from hatching to laying eggs to planting trees to producing fruit and from garden refuse to compost bin. They will learn where food comes from and how to treat animals with respect. The students will learn to cooperate, be kind, and how to take turns. They will be instructed on proper handling of animals and how to feed and care for them. By creating this hands-on learning opportunity, students will have the ability to bring their classroom learnings to life. Classroom teachers will be able to use the chickens and garden to reinforce and extend learning in science, agriculture, and environmental awareness.

Caring for a flock of chickens and a garden is a great way for students to learn about biology, compassionate animal husbandry, food science and sustainable living practices.

The Nature and Gardening Project has been awarded a $3,000 LIFT Grant.
Art and music programs have long been shown to enhance students’ critical thinking skills and creativity along with improving their concentration, motivation, and confidence. With COVID-19 wreaking havoc on communities and schools, the arts are playing an even more critical role in helping children express themselves, connect with each other, process stress, and stay engaged in their new virtual learning environment.

Congratulations go out to Peoria Education Association member, Frank Eager. Frank, an educator at Sunrise Mountain High School applied for and received a California Casualty Music and Arts Grant this past year for Visual Arts Ceramics. With supply costs rising and budgets being eliminated, this grant will help Frank expand the curriculum for all his students.
AEA Partners in Education Award

This award demonstrates the AEA’s strong belief in the importance of community support for the success of our public schools. The award honors corporations, local businesses, individuals, or community groups that exhibit exemplary support for local public schools.

Landings Credit Union and Harvey Gibson
Nominated by Steve Adams, Tempe Secondary Education Association

Landings Credit Union, formerly Tempe Schools Credit Union, was founded in a closet at Tempe High School by educators over 65 years ago. Throughout their history, they have supported and advocated for the Tempe Union, Tempe Elementary and the Kyrene school districts by providing financial services to the faculty, staff and families of these three districts. In the last few years, they have expanded their business model, changing their name so that they can serve the broader community in Arizona with the same services they have been providing our local community.

Landings Credit Union has sponsored our new teacher event by paying for the food and providing drawing prizes for all the new teachers. This partnership has been invaluable to Tempe Secondary EA and our school district.

Landings Credit Union Business Development Officer, Harvey Gibson, consistently offers special programs tailored to teachers and their needs, such as summer skip on loan payments and zero interest loans for teachers. They also offer scholarships to help teachers further their education by picking up part of the cost to take masters level classes. They also have programs for students in the form of direct deposits for good grades into student accounts, as an incentive for doing well in school.

Every year Landings Credit Union assists in raising money for the Tempe Education Foundation. Their assistance is invaluable in creating funds for scholarships and grants that benefit both teachers and students in the Tempe Union High School District.

We are proud to give Landings Credit Union and Harvey Gibson the 2021 AEA Partners in Education Award.
Casas Adobes Elks, B.P.O.E. #2663
Nominated by Anthony Lovio, Flowing Wells Education Association

For over a decade, the Tucson Elks Lodge has supported Laguna Elementary school with a multitude of programs. They promote physical activity with their annual soccer tournament and basketball shoot-out, giving students incentives to reach their full potential. They also assist students and families with a yearly Clothe a Child drive which takes students shopping for new clothes and school supplies. During the holidays, the Elks support our families with plentiful food box donations.

Their generosity and consistent support make a huge impact on the Laguna Elementary school community. We are proud to give the Casas Adobes Elks the 2021 AEA Partners in Education Award.
National Board Certification

This past year, 27 AEA teachers achieved National Board Certification (NBC) or renewed their Certification. To earn National Board Certification, teachers prove their knowledge and skill through a series of performance-based assessments, including a portfolio of lessons and samples of student work, videotapes, and rigorous analyses of their teaching. The AEA Foundation for Teaching & Learning dedicates significant resources to NBC scholarships in our effort to recruit, prepare and support quality public school teachers. We congratulate the following AEA members on their NBC achievement.

Michelle Ang  
Kyrene EA

Kelda Kastner Lewis  
Mesa EA

Kristin Rebb  
Phoenix Union CTA

Cathleen Bailey-Bagby  
Lake Havasu City EA

Cindy King  
Phoenix Union CTA

Rachel Redman Simms  
Sahuarita EA

Michelle Bordonaro  
Higley EA

April Knippen  
Tucson EA

Carol Spenik  
Paradise Valley EA

Shawna Collins  
Deer Valley EA

Jill Menaugh  
Amphitheater EA

Kelsey Tomlinson  
Scottsdale EA

Anne Coulthard  
Marana EA

Faith Meyer  
Mesa EA

Jean Vogel  
Dysart EA

Jessica England  
Sahuarita EA

Bridget Montoya  
Flowing Wells EA

Heather Walsh  
Avondale District EA

Kerri Glover  
Gilbert EA

Heather Perry  
Washington District EA

Stephen Wilding  
Deer Valley EA

Claren Gustkey  
Scottsdale EA

Jennifer Perry  
Glendale Union EA

Catherine Harris-Herchenroeder  
Tucson EA

Lindsey Peterson  
Glendale Union EA

Marian Johnson  
Amphitheater EA

Jillian Powers  
Flowing Wells EA
AEA Foundation for Teaching & Learning

The AEA Foundation for Teaching & Learning was created in 1997 to advance public education in Arizona. It started with only $3,000 designated for student scholarships. Today, the Foundation has over $1.2 million in assets and has awarded more than $900,000 in grants throughout Arizona.

The AEA Foundation for Teaching & Learning is proud to offer a variety of programs dedicated to elevating the teaching profession; preparing quality educators; contributing to student achievement; encouraging the appreciation for the arts; enriching classroom academics; developing professional leadership; and inspiring innovations in learning. There are nine program funds that offer grant awards to Arizona public school teachers, education support professionals, and students.

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