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’s 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 how important the work they do is. 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 2022 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
Estevan Carreon
Glendale Union Education Association

The 2022 Christa McAuliffe award recipient is Estevan Carreon, a special education teacher at Independence High School in the Glendale Union High School District. Estevan Carreon makes us proud to be an educator because “he reaches each student at their level and their moment and empowers them to be better.”

Estevan Carreon teaches students with disabilities and uses his skills to propel students forward. Whether it is helping a student to read more proficiently, encouraging a student to persevere through adversity, or building life-long coping mechanisms, Estevan is dedicated to making sure his students have every advantage for life. He is flexible when he needs and yet provides a great deal of structure and routine to students who may need a break from the chaos. He is often a liaison to outside agencies to provide his student’s parents with great resources. Estevan challenges his students academically and most importantly, emotionally. He has a knack for reaching students who have had little school success and empowering them with the knowledge that they are worthy of support.

In addition to being innovative in his classroom, Estevan has also been creative in changing the culture of Independence High School and the district. As the director of all Unitown camps, his program received the Achievement Above All award in the Glendale Union High School District. Under his guidance, the Unitown camp experience allows students to learn powerful life skills of leadership, diversity, inclusiveness, respect, and understanding. The program inspires students to change for the better.
But Estevan didn’t stop there. He created a similar *Unitown* experience for underclassmen. In his Personal Skills class, he facilitates student discussions on topics related to cultural diversity, race, current events, bullying, and interpersonal relationships. These conversations engage the students and develop their critical thinking skills.

Estevan is definitely a lifelong learner and has earned two master’s degrees in secondary education and education leadership. He regularly takes courses to improve his teaching and recently took a course offered by rethinkED. The course provided training to help students with anxiety, depression, human trafficking risks, online safety, preventing violence, reducing the risk of suicide, social skills, self-management, trauma, and other issues. After completing the course, he incorporated these learnings into his classroom and the *Unitown* program. Then, he shared these skills by offering training to his district colleagues.

Estevan Carreon is a strong advocate for public education and public schools. During the Red for Ed movement, he led teachers in weekly walk-ins prior to school to demonstrate educator and community commitment to Independence High School. As chairperson of the district’s professional negotiations committee, he led the committee to advocate for teacher pay, benefits, and working conditions. He has held numerous elected positions in the Arizona Education Association and the National Education Association — from local association president to AEA Board of Director to NEA State Director on the NEA Board of Directors. Estevan has advocated for all educators.

Estevan Carreon is a role-model for his students. He offers comfort and support to countless students who struggle with day-to-day life. He listens, he counsels, and he respects them — all the qualities that make many students consider him the greatest teacher at Independence High School.

Congratulations Estevan Carreon! We are proud that you are the 2022 AEA Christa McAuliffe 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.

Jessica Kitterman
Flagstaff Education Association

Jessica Kitterman is currently an English Language Learner Specialist at Puente de Hózhó Elementary School in the Flagstaff Unified School District. She began her career in Nogales, Arizona as a kindergarten teacher and a bilingual preschool teacher. In 2001, she helped to initiate the first trilingual language school in Flagstaff, Puente de Hózhó. From 2001-2019 she served as a Kindergarten and 3rd grade Spanish teacher.

Jessica holds a Masters Degree in Bilingual and Multicultural Education. She is fluent in Spanish and English and has studied Spanish both abroad and in the United States. She has also logged countless hours of professional development to grow and respond to the needs of students.

Jessica’s work with the Ballet Folklorico de Colores, a traditional Mexican dance program, has provided children and families an avenue to express their culture and to learn about cultures around them. This work has led to improved self-awareness in the participants. She has secured scholarships and grant funding for anyone who is interested in participating but lacks the financial means. Jessica also supports the group with costume procurement, costume care, and assists dancers changing between performances. She has attended nearly all performances since 2002.

Jessica has led local committees that work to improve of our school district support of human and civil rights. When SB1070 was enacted, students and families were faced with the choice to risk separation due to deportation. Many families chose not to send their children to school out of fear that they may be stopped and searched if they left the house. Jessica worked to create documentation which she presented to the Flagstaff Unified School District’s school board to encourage them to take a position on the subject and to help advocate and protect our migrant families.
Jessica’s quest for improved human relations and civil rights is demonstrated by her work with Northern Arizona Interfaith Council and the Arizona Immigration law clinic as an advocate for minority students and families in Flagstaff. She has dedicated herself to human and civil rights service by:

- Being a liaison that facilitates conversations between with the Flagstaff Unified School District and immigrant parents.
- Supporting new immigrant families by counseling them on the legal requirements and translating the legal paperwork to establish themselves in the country.
- Collaborating with the Flagstaff Unified School District in conjunction with the Arizona Immigration Law clinic to generate inclusive and equitable policies for minority families.
- Writing a resolution declaring Flagstaff Unified School District’s commitment to diversity and inclusion in response to concerns for the safety of the district’s migrant students and families.
- Facilitating positive ways to strengthen the relationships between minority families and the schools.

Jessica Kitterman has also been a strong local leader for exercising and promoting participation in many democratic processes. She has worked on the campaign teams for politicians who value public education and minority students. She is an example of how one vote can make a difference in a complex society. She believes in the power of numbers and encourages all individuals to practice their constitutional rights to vote. She has spent countless personal hours away from her family advocating for initiatives around educational issues, environmental issues, voting rights issues, as well as human rights issues.

Her work is driven by her passion and belief that all individuals deserve equitable access to life’s basic rights. She motivates those around her to make a difference in the world around them and work together to create and inspire change.

Congratulations Jessica Kitterman! We are proud that you are the 2022 AEA Human & Civil Rights Award recipient.
Diversity Grant

The AEA Diversity Grant is given to develop or pursue instructional programs or curriculum that promotes diversity, tolerance, and respect for humankind.

Jule Abeytia and Danielle VanDerlaske
Flowing Wells Education Association

Jule Abeytia and Danielle VanDerlaske have been awarded the AEA Diversity Grant to establish a Diversity Library that is grade-level appropriate in the Homer Davis Elementary School in the Flowing Wells Unified School District. The AEA Diversity Grant request is for $752.24

The grant proceeds will purchase a set of at least ten diversity and inclusion focused books for each grade level from Kindergarten to Sixth grade for our campus. Each grade level would have age-appropriate, reading-level appropriate books that explore a spectrum of race, ability and background diversity points of view. Each collection would stay with the grade level with the pre- and post- surveys, independent on changing staff positions.

The program coordinators will organize and provide electronic copies of pre-surveys and post-surveys for all grade levels. And additionally organize and provide electronic copies of discussion prompts for excerpts of longer chapter books. Each start and end of the school year, the program coordinators would survey to measure teachers’ interest level and ability to work this curriculum into a planned schedule over the course of an academic year.

Although individual teachers may address diversity, social, and inclusion issues differently. There has been an uptick of negative behaviors on campus stemming from misjudgments, racial issues, and lack of positive peer communication. We believe
if students were able to be exposed to stories and teacher-facilitated discussions involving diverse backgrounds and varying points of view over the span of their time at Homer Davis, the culture of the campus would be positively impacted. Acceptance, understanding and respect would be woven into a student’s literary experience over the course of attendance. The literacy collections would be a tool for teachers to easily involve their classes in social and emotional learning. The campus expectation of inclusion and acceptance would be mirrored in the literary experience throughout each grade level.

Congratulations Jule Abeytia and Danielle VanDerlaske for receiving the 2022 AEA Diversity Grant to establish a Diversity Library and curriculum.
AEA Retired Les Reynolds
Distinguished Senior Service Award

This award acknowledges and honors a member who provides outstanding service to AEA Retired and the communities he or she serves.

Ken Freed
AEA-Retired

The AEA-Retired Executive Board is pleased to announce that Ken Freed has been selected as the 2022 Les Reynolds Distinguished Senior Service Award recipient.

The AEA-Retired Board of Directors selected the recipient at the February board meeting based on the nomination by Luci Messing. The nomination commended Ken’s 17 years of service to AEA-Retired serving on the AEA-Retired Executive Board as Vice President, AEA Director, Secretary, Documents Committee Chair and Budget Committee. Ken was active as a leader in the Tucson Education Association for many years serving as the Association Rep, Area Director, President Elect and President for three years. Ken also served as NEA Director for AEA and has attended many NEA Representative Assemblies. He has been on the AEA Finance and Revenue Committee the past several years.

Ken also has been Pima County Democratic Precinct Committeeman and Chadash Board of Directors. Ken’s community service includes a special program he started for at-risk middle school students. He continues to read to elementary students during “Read Across America” week.

During Ken’s teaching career, he was named AEA’s 2004 Christa McAuliffe Award recipient and Tucson’s Teacher of the Year.

Ken Freed demonstrates all the principled and leadership qualities that are associated with the Les Reynolds Distinguished Senior Service Award, and he richly deserves to be named the 2022 recipient.
California Casualty Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant

The Arizona Education Association’s endorsed auto and home insurance provider, California Casualty, re-launched its Thomas R. Brown (TRB) Athletics Grant Program just as student-athletes began the process of safely returning to youth sports in 2021. Public middle and high schools whose sports programs experienced budget restrictions and limited fundraising opportunities were invited to apply for their $1,000 TRB Athletic Grant.

Christy Herndon
Chandler Education Association

The grant program was named for California Casualty Chairman Emeritus Tom Brown, an avid sportsman who experienced the positive impact of playing sports as a youth. He believed what coaches and educators have confirmed: lessons learned on athletic fields — teamwork, confidence and sportsmanship — translate to the classroom and beyond.

Congratulations go out to Chandler Education Association member, Christy Herndon. Christy, an educator at Chandler High School applied for and received the California Casualty Thomas R. Brown Athletic Grant this past year for the newly created Girls Flag Football program. The funds will help offset the cost to the students and their parents.

“Youth sports are important to our children’s physical and mental health, especially now. The California Casualty Athletics Grant Program benefits students, schools and communities; and we are honored to be a part of that effort,” said Lisa Almeida, Assistant Vice President.
Honoring and celebrating the accomplishments of extraordinary educators

Mary Meer, Christmas Angel Program
*Nomination by Mario Ruiz, Flowing Wells Education Association*

Flowing Wells Education Association is grateful for Mary Meer’s work in our community. She has been a champion of the Flowing Wells High School Christmas Angel program since 2017. Her partnership allows us to foster a stronger bond between students and our school. In December 2021, Mary provided the opportunity for Flowing Wells High School to give 15 families — over 70 people — a Holiday Dinner box. In addition to the meals, Mary’s efforts provided 40 plush toys to distribute to children. Her generosity proves that students are loved beyond the classroom.

Mary’s involvement began when her son, Robert Meer, served as the high school’s College and Career counselor. When he left the district to pursue other career goals, Mary continued her support of Flowing Wells High School. Each year she enlists the support of her family, friends, and community members to raise money, collect gifts, and provide food to families in need. Between 2017 and 2021, Mary Meer has raised over $6,000 to provide Christmas for over 84 families with students in Flowing Wells High School.

We are proud to honor Mary Meer with the 2022 AEA Partners in Education Award.
Robert Thames and KJ Naae, **Read to a Dog Program**  
*Nominated by Deborah Lovio, Flowing Wells Education Association*

Mr. Robert Thames and Ms. KJ Naae volunteer with the *Read to a Dog* program, through the Alliance of Therapy Dogs Inc, at Robert Richardson Elementary School in the Flowing Wells Unified School District. Both Mr. Thames and Ms. Naae have certified, trained therapy dogs that are brought to the library so students can read aloud to the dogs. The students cannot wait to hear which class gets to have *Read to a Dog* because it brings them so much joy. Students sit with the dog and read aloud. This not only helps students improve their fluency and reading skills, but there is an emotional factor and connection. As educators know, COVID-19 has taken a great toll on education and students, both emotionally and academically. *Read to a Dog* is a program that helps students at our school. As they read and pet the dog, the calming, positive effects are clearly observable. Students continually ask when their furry friends will visit next because they love to read to Charlie, Jake, and Kahlua. The *Read to a Dog* program has been an excellent, positive addition to the Richardson Elementary School library and Mr. Thames and Ms. Naae are most worthy of our recognition.

We are proud to honor Robert Thames and KJ Naae with the 2022 AEA Partners in Education Award.

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**Old Navy at the Tucson Mall**  
*Nominated by Anthony Lovio, Flowing Wells Education Association*

Over the past year, the Old Navy store at the Tucson Mall has supported the Laguna Elementary School in numerous ways. They have donated office supplies to our teachers and have helped our students during their annual holiday “Adopt-A-Family” event with new clothes and toys. Old Navy Tucson Mall has also made a generous donation to our campus beautification project allowing us to help our students take pride in their campus. Their partnership with Laguna Elementary School is both valued and appreciated.

We are proud to honor the Old Navy store located in the Tucson Mall with the 2022 AEA Partners in Education Award.
**National Board Certification**

This past year, 28 AEA teachers achieved National Board Certification (NBC) and 41 AEA Teachers 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.

### New National Board Certified Teachers

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School District</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wendy Dafoe</td>
<td>Chandler Unified School District</td>
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<td>Lydia Donahue</td>
<td>Mesa Unified School District</td>
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<td>Allison Ekren</td>
<td>Chandler Unified School District</td>
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<td>Pamela Fulk</td>
<td>Paradise Valley Unified School District</td>
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<td>Jamie Hammer</td>
<td>Lake Havasu Unified School District</td>
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<td>Nina Jolly</td>
<td>Tucson Unified School District</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Keith</td>
<td>Deer Valley Unified School District</td>
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<td>Jessica Kerich</td>
<td>Deer Valley Unified School District</td>
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<td>Nancy Magnusson</td>
<td>Madison Elementary School District</td>
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<td>Talitha Martin</td>
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<td>Joan McCoy</td>
<td>Flagstaff Unified School District</td>
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<td>Aliza Michel</td>
<td>Washington Elementary School District</td>
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<td>Carol Nowakowski</td>
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<td>Johanna Pascador</td>
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<td>Wendy Ramos</td>
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<td>Angela Rico</td>
<td>Crane Elementary School District</td>
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<td>Kelly Room</td>
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<td>Haley Rubio</td>
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<td>Miriam Schantz-Marion</td>
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<td>Jennifer Senatore</td>
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<td>Shawn Smith</td>
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<td>Shannon Stapley</td>
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<td>Kizzy Tanner</td>
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<td>John Trenton</td>
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<td>Mary Adelle Veridiano</td>
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<td>Karyn White</td>
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<td>Melisa Wiltbank</td>
<td>Gilbert Unified School District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrie Wolfe</td>
<td>Tempe Elementary School District</td>
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Honoring and celebrating the accomplishments of extraordinary educators

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 $1.3 million in assets and has awarded more than $1.1 million 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 now ten program funds that offer grants to Arizona public school teachers, education support professionals, and students.

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