



Contact: Stephanie Wellman
Phone: 209-536-2016
Email: swellman@tcsos.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools Honor Educators at 2026 Excellence in Teaching Awards

[Sonora, CA, 5/6/26] The Tuolumne County Board of Education (TCBOE) and Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools (TCSOS) hosted the 2026 Excellence in Teaching Awards on Tuesday, April 28, honoring 16 local teachers for their dedication and exceptional contributions to education.

The evening was filled with appreciation and gratitude for the educators that are shaping the future of our community. It took place at the Chicken Ranch Ballroom, and celebrated the everyday excellence in our schools. The Summerville High Jazz at 8 band performed, and Summerville High FFA students created floral arrangements, underscoring the impact teachers have on our students and community.

County Superintendent Zack Abernathy chaired the event, and emphasized the impact these teachers have made in the classroom and beyond saying, “Their impact extends far beyond textbooks and lesson plans; it shapes the future. Thanks to the dedication and excellence in this room of educators, the future generation is in good hands.”

The evening drew to a close by recognizing one teacher with the highest honor of the evening, the Career Achievement Award. This year the award was presented to Pete Smith of Sonora High School. Mr. Smith has devoted more than three decades to public education at Sonora High School. Superintendent Ed Pelfrey of Sonora High said, “Pete Smith’s career is defined not merely by longevity, but by lasting significance. Since 1989, he has embodied what it truly means to dedicate one’s life to public education. His influence has strengthened not only the school, but the broader community it serves, and his legacy is woven into the fabric of Tuolumne County.”

This annual event brings together educators from across the county, and as County Superintendent Abernathy said, “We have the power to change lives through our belief that education is important”. Thank you to every educator who embodies this belief, and for dedicating your careers to the students of Tuolumne County.

2026 Teachers of Excellence:

- Jordan Vogt – ATCAA
- Sasha Voigt – Belleview
- Britney Barsotti – Big Oak Flat-Groveland
- Jake Heldstab – Columbia Elementary
- Kim Pippa Tonnesen – Columbia College
- Sherri Wels – Curtis Creek
- Emily Scholten – Gold Rush Charter School
- Janelle Williams – Jamestown
- Lacey Iveson – Sonora Elementary
- Kurt Wolken – Sonora High School
- Michelle Harrington – Soulsbyville
- CJ Dyer – Summerville Elementary
- Amy Peterson – Summerville High School
- Rhonda Montano – TCSOS
- Elisa Root – Twain Harte
- Pete Smith – Sonora High School, Career Achievement

For more information about the annual Excellence in Teaching Awards visit:

<https://www.tcsos.us/about/board/excellence-in-teaching-awards/>.