**SchoolsFirst FCU Sponsors Awards Gala for Santa Maria-Bonita School District**

*Awards recognize excellence among the district’s teachers, administrators and classified employees*

**Tustin, Calif. (April 30, 2025)** – [SchoolsFirst Federal](https://www.schoolsfirstfcu.org/gateway/schoolsfirstfcu/home) Credit Union, the largest credit union in California and the largest serving school employees and their families, today announced its sponsorship of the Santa Maria-Bonita School District’s Excellence in Education Awards Gala held on March 6. The event celebrated the achievements of the district’s employees by honoring the talent, dedication and passion they bring to make Santa Maria-Bonita schools exceptional. Excellence in Education Awards are presented in three categories: classified employees, certificated employees (teachers) and administrative employees.

“By recognizing their district’s excellent teachers, administrators and classified employees, Santa Maria-Bonita is ensuring that its schools create an environment that creates a positive impact for students and lays the groundwork for their future success,” said Everardo Velazquez, school and community relations specialist at SchoolsFirst FCU. “SchoolsFirst FCU is proud to support this important initiative.”

**Classified Employees.** Angel Leyva of Bruce Elementary was honored as the Classified Employee of the Year. Other employees recognized as finalists in this category included:

* Maria Salcido, Human Resources
* Sandra Vargas, Sanchez Elementary
* Maria Cortez, Multilingual Services
* Jessica Hettler, Alvin Elementary
* Eric Palmer, Information Technology
* Elsa Vargas, Alvin Elementary
* Debra Green, Arellanes Junior High
* Norma Rico, El Camino Junior High
* Veronica Cuenca, Business Services

**Certificated Teachers.** Esperanza Ruiz of El Camino Junior High was honored as the Teacher of the Year. Other employees recognized as finalists in this category included:

* Summer Long, Alvin Elementary
* Abe Espino, El Camino Junior High
* Lisa Johns, Special Education
* Bridgette C. Howard, Rice Elementary
* Therese Brady, Arellanes Elementary
* Gabriela Jimenez, Teaching and Learning Core
* Gricelda Gonzalez, Jimenez Elementary
* Maria Yeni Cisneros, El Camino Junior High
* Oliver Curley, Battles Elementary
* Valerie Sterbonic, Tunnell Elementary

**Administrative Employees.** Alex Jauregui of El Camino Junior High was honored as the Administrator of the Year. Other employees recognized as finalists in this category included:

* Mark Palmerston, Student and Family Services
* Heather Allen, El Camino Junior High
* Ryan Young, Adam Elementary
* Tammie Castillo-Shiffer, Multilingual Services
* Tricia Robertson, Special Education
* Cynthia Duncan, Liberty Elementary
* Andy Symons, El Camino Junior High
* Genevieve Beaird, Arellanes Junior High
* Tamara Brown, Adam Elementary

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About SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union

SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union is the largest credit union serving school employees, and for the sixth year in a row, Forbes has named SchoolsFirst FCU the top credit union in California. Serving school employees and their families, the organization is dedicated to delivering World-Class Personal Service and improving the financial lives of its Members. In J.D. Power’s 2025 inaugural U.S. Credit Union Satisfaction Study, its Members ranked them #1 for overall satisfaction. Today they serve nearly 1.5 million Members with a full range of financial products and services. SchoolsFirst FCU was founded in 1934, when 126 school employees pooled $1,200 and established a Member-owned cooperative to help improve each other's lives. The Credit Union has more than $33 billion in assets and remains the largest credit union in California and the third largest credit union in the United States. For more information about SchoolsFirst FCU, visit schoolsfirstfcu.org.

Insured by NCUA.

Contact:

Robin Wachner

SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union

rwachner@schoolsfirstfcu.org