



PRESS RELEASE

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Poway Unified Announces Three District Teachers of the Year *Lisa Casey-O'Brien, Jo Ann Cooper, Julie Harris Receive Honors*

The Poway Unified School District proudly recognizes our teachers and announces that Lisa Casey O'Brien, Jo Ann Cooper, and Julie Harris have been chosen as Poway Unified School District Teachers of the Year for 2011-2012 from a very distinguished list of school site teachers of the year.

A committee of past winners and school administrators selected the three district-level Teachers of the Year. All the honorees have incorporated exemplary learning programs into their teaching, and are making a positive difference to the students of the Poway Unified School District.

Lisa Casey-O'Brien

Physics Teacher

Poway High School

Whether cracking nerdy physics jokes (and waiting for laughter) or incorporating information from students about their career aspirations and favorite activities within physics problems, Lisa Casey-O'Brien fashions innovative ideas to foster a positive learning environment and student buy-in for a very challenging subject.

Lisa says her greatest accomplishments occur when students leave her class with a love of science and an understanding of physics concepts. She is most proud of the rapport she has built with her students and how this has helped them to be successful. For example, Lisa convinced a student who was not doing his work and failing science early on to switch to Advanced Placement (AP) science. She told him if he was going to fail a class by not doing work it should be in an AP class. He ended up accepting the challenge, going to tutorial for help, and doing very well in class. The student came back during college to tell Lisa she had changed his life. Nobody had ever told him they felt he was capable of taking an AP course before, altering his outlook and chance for success. Lisa also hears from students who say how much easier the physics courses in college were for them than their peers, and a UCLA physics professor said Lisa's students were consistently better prepared than others for his class.

Lisa also makes modifications for students in cases of illness, special needs, and special situations so that stress for many students (and parents) is alleviated and the students can meet

standards. Pass rates of students in Lisa's classes are outstanding: 96% for California Standards Tests and 93% for AP tests.

Students have front-row seats to Lisa's quirky sense of humor and enthusiasm. She uses jokes, strange voices, and silly songs to help students remember equations and other things that must be memorized.

"I let my enthusiasm for science show through, whether by parading around in my baseball cap signed by David Gross (winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics) or by showing an online clip on a current topic in physics (like the Large Hadron Collider rap video)." said Lisa. "This enthusiasm becomes contagious. I often have students bring me clips from science-related articles or show me online clips related to physics."

Lisa is a huge proponent of using real-world applications such as having students complete a playground project during which they apply their physics knowledge to analyze playground equipment in terms of fun (as it relates to speed and forces and safety). An annual field trip to Magic Mountain finds students measuring forces and speeds of roller coasters to analyze the physics involved with each ride. She also collaborates with the auto shop teacher on campus so students can see how concepts of electricity, magnetism, and thermodynamics are applied in cars.

Lisa, who has taught science at Poway High for 15 years, is involved in school activities with staff and students. She serves on the hiring committee for new science teachers, the district's new physics text adoption committee, with a group of teachers focusing on freshmen success and school-wide consistency of expectations, and as the Poway Federation of Teachers' representative. She participates in ASB activities like spirit week, peer counseling, as a member of the teacher airband's group, and as faculty advisor for physics club and the African American Student Alliance.

Lisa received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology with a minor in Physics from the University of San Diego and a Masters of Arts degree in math, science, and technology information from Cal State San Marcos.

Jo Ann Cooper

Eighth Grade Mathematics Teacher
Twin Peaks Middle School

Colleagues at Twin Peaks Middle School share that Jo Ann is a "*walking heart with arms*" and she surely represents Poway's commitment to supporting the whole child, whatever it takes. Entering the education profession as a second career, Jo Ann felt a calling to work with students who struggled. She instinctively knew the safety of school and the love she could provide were powerful agents of change. Seeing all students experience success, no matter what it takes, is Jo Ann Cooper's driving philosophy. For eleven years, she has successfully crafted a learning environment that promotes risk taking and results with accomplishments beyond the eighth grade math standards.

Developing positive self images, encouraging resiliency, and building effective problem solving skills are the core of her tireless efforts.

Jo Ann extends her work with students before school and during the lunch period for those who need more personalized support. She has a reputation for turning the most challenging students around ensuring that all students feel successful with their math abilities.

Jo Ann's innovative techniques demystify math for students. "I am most proud of the students who have come into my classroom saying they couldn't do math, but left me confident they could not only do math, but could do it very well," she said.

Jo Ann listens really hard to her students, encouraging them to believe in themselves and take risks as they become advocates for their own learning.

Tapping into different modalities, Jo Ann uses visuals, charts, mnemonics, actions, and technology to bring math concepts to shape for students. She creates an environment in which students want to talk about math; these conversations extend the classroom wall using instructional technology such as Compass Learning, MIND Math, and the Khan Academy online curriculums to differentiate instruction, and form deeper understandings. As their final homework assignment each year, Jo Ann's algebra students complete a cumulative review that also serves as their end of summer, pre-geometry warm-up activity. Two weeks before school starts, a note online reminds them it is time to re-do their final algebra review for success in geometry. The kids respond with enthusiasm by having online discussions as they remember how to solve the different problems.

"It's a tremendous compliment to me when a former student stops by my classroom, sends me a note, or sees me around town and says that I helped them both learn and enjoy math. When a parent takes the time to let me know the positive influence I had on their child's education, I know I made an impact upon my students," said Jo Ann.

Jo Ann has taught mathematics at Twin Peaks Middle School for 11 years. She received her Bachelor of Science on Microbiology from Pennsylvania State University, and her California Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, Administrative Services Certificate, and Master of Arts Degree in Educational Leadership from Cal State San Marcos.

Julie Harris

Fourth Grade Teacher

Willow Grove Elementary School

"I consider myself the *CDO: Chief Dream Officer*. In this incredible role, my job is to prepare, inspire, and encourage my students to succeed, not just for the ten months they are with me, but in the world of tomorrow."

Julie Harris' philosophy has guided her work as an educator throughout her 35 years in the teaching profession. She wants students to know that whoever they are, wherever they come from, and wherever they are headed—the world is full of possibilities.

Julie's classroom is a true sense of community that highlights the contributions of all students and reflects the goals she holds as the core instructional practice. She believes a classroom should promote three basic skills that will ensure students are able to thrive in all aspects of their present and future: the ability to do critical thinking and problem-solving, the ability to communicate effectively, and the ability to collaborate. Innovative projects such as her California Dreaming travel brochure integrate social studies, research, reading, and writing and reflect her commitment to supporting the three goals noted above. Julie shares that hands-on simulations and integrative teaching build student engagement.

On the very first day of class Julie tells her students, "I am not your fourth grade teacher. (big pause) I am your sixth grade (middle school) preparatory teacher." Eyes widen, sometimes there is an audible gasp. Eventually, smiles break out on every face. These children realize they are getting the inside scoop for success. Also on that first day, students are asked to record and share their hopes and dreams for the year. Nikki said she dreamed about not being afraid of math. Aidan wanted to get even higher scores on a MAP test. And Paul said he wanted to learn how to make friends and feel smart. Julie said knowing where her students are and where they want to be helps her plan according to their expressed needs.

Julie is committed to nurturing, supporting, and guiding her students in a holistic manner. "To allow each child to reach his or her full potential, I need to teach my students not just what to learn, but how to learn." She designs thematic instruction which extends beyond standards to include lessons in solid work ethic, study skills, organizational skills, and relationship skills. She works with her students to help each one set personal academic and social goals. Her dedication to the whole child has inspired Julie to become a facilitator of "Teaching Children to Care," a class designed to promote building positive relationships in classrooms, school, and beyond for fellow district teachers.

Julie has been teaching in the Poway Unified School District since 1986, first at Westwood Elementary School, as a founding faculty member at Turtleback Elementary School, as the first PUSD teacher to hold a two-year appointment as a Distinguished Teacher in Residence at California State University, San Marcos (1995-1997), once again at Turtleback, and from 2008 to the present at Willow Grove Elementary School.

Julie received her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Education from Loyola Marymount University.

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