

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Shea Duryea
Communications Director
School Connect
shea@schoolconnectaz.org
602.405.9082



School Connect Announces Top 24 Statewide Education Finalists for Arizona 2024 Champions of Education Awards

Arizona's 'Best in Education' to be Honored at School Connect's 2024 Champions of Education Awards

Scottsdale, April 5, 2024 - Honoring the brightest stars in Arizona education, School Connect announces the top three Arizona education finalists in 8 education categories. Finalists are celebrated for their ability to cultivate leadership in others, showcasing distinctive and enduring approaches to education. They spearhead collaborative endeavors aimed at bolstering both academic excellence and comprehensive support services for students, while also serving as beacons of hope and courage, inspiring both colleagues and students alike.

Hosted by Danielle Lerner, *AZ Living Host* of Cox Yurview, on April 25, 2024, over 200 attendees from school districts statewide are expected to attend. Festivities include an awards ceremony, student performances, and breakfast from 8:15-10:30 a.m. where winners will be announced at Orange Tree Golf Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The 2023 winner of the School Category, Principal Lynette Wegner from Valencia Newcomer School in Alhambra Elementary School District [shared](#) about her school's mission to welcome students from 22 different countries to their first experience of education in Arizona.

"Every student has a story. Our staff makes it a priority to learn that story so that they can help support."

In accordance with School Connect's mission, 7 multi-sector community awards for leaders who have been champions of Arizona education will also be honored at the event from business, nonprofit, faith-based organizations and government agencies.

School Connect Proudly Announces Arizona Finalists for the Following Categories:

Student Champion of the Year K-6

Samuel Granado, Pendergast Elementary School District
Aquilla Ricks, Liberty Elementary School District
Makayla Reid, Littleton Elementary School District

Student Champion of the Year 7-12

Fatimah Amer, BASIS Scottsdale
Ethan Lemka, Peoria Unified School District
Austin Stasik, Cave Creek Unified School District

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Hero Maker Award (Teacher)

Rebecca Bhasme, Willcox Unified School District
Monica Landaiche, Liberty Elementary School District
Cindy Thompson, Queen Creek Unified School District

Catalyst for Education Award (Principal)

Courtney Frazier, Litchfield Elementary School District
Loy Guzman, Apache Elementary School District
John Mospan, Washington Elementary School District

Changemaker Award (Superintendent)

Dr. Jennifer Cruz, Pendergast Elementary School District
Dr. Roger Freeman, Littleton Elementary School District
Dr. Scott A. Menzel, Scottsdale Unified School District

Collaborative Leadership Award (School Board Member)

Samantha Davis, Queen Creek Unified School District
Gina DeCoste, Agua Fria Union High School District
Hilda Ortega-Rosales, Pendergast Elementary School District

School Champion of the Year Award (School Champion)

Saravanan S. Bala, Orcutt | Winslow
Taylor Perkins, CHASSE Building Team
Alexa Ruona, Arizona State University

Because It Takes A Village Award (School)

Jack Barnes Elementary School, Principal Dawn Kennaugh, Queen Creek Unified School District
Litchfield Elementary School, Principal Sabine Hopper, Litchfield Elementary School District
Sweetwater Elementary School, Principal Susie Smith, Washington Elementary School District

For more information and to register, please visit the School Connect website [here](#).

More About School Connect

School Connect is a leading organization dedicated to fostering collaborations between business leaders and school districts, creating opportunities and a brighter future for students. With a decade of impactful initiatives, School Connect continues to be at the forefront of preparing the next generation of leaders.