

NEWS RELEASE
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School Connect Announces TOP 24 Finalists for 2026 Champions of Education Awards

Ceremony to Honor Student, School and Community Leaders Making an Impact Across Arizona

PHOENIX, April 8, 2026 – School Connect is proud to announce the Top 24 finalists for the 2026 Champions of Education Awards, recognizing outstanding individuals and organizations who lead with heart, and are helping to build a brighter future for Arizona youth.

From elementary school students, to administrators and nonprofit partners, these finalists exemplify courageous leadership and a commitment to collaborative community support of education. They are an important reminder of the role we can all play in creating pathways for student success across the state.

“When kids are held by a community that shows up for them, that knows them, believes in them, and refuses to let them disappear into the cracks, they reach heights no one could have predicted,” said School Connect CEO and Founder Tracey Beal. “These honorees showed up for their school, for their families, for the kids who needed them most. They went first. They kept going. The ripple effects of their commitment are immeasurable.”

Finalists will be celebrated at the 6th Annual School Connect Champions of Education Awards ceremony on Thursday, April 30, 2026, from 7:30 am to 10:30 am at the Orange Tree Golf Resort, Mariposa Ballroom, 10601 N. 56th Street, Scottsdale, AZ 85254.

2026 Finalists:

Student Champion of the Year K-6

Umaiza Amer, Student, BASIS Scottsdale

Julius Bradley, Student, Queen Creek Unified School District, Silver Valley Elementary School

Asha Curley, Student, BASIS Scottsdale

Student Champion of the Year 7-12

Andrew Brown, Student, Miami Unified School District, Miami Junior-Senior High School

Treshawn Kumparak, Student, Miami Unified School District, Miami Junior-Senior High School

Viren Roojam, Miami Unified School District, Miami Junior-Senior High School

Hero Maker Award (Teacher)

Robert Allen, Teacher, Gilbert Public Schools, Highland High School
Bernadette Fain, Teacher, Litchfield Elementary School District, Verrado Heritage Elementary School
Jennifer Martinez, Teacher, Alhambra Elementary School District, James W. Rice Elementary School

Catalyst for Education Award (Principal)

Charlotte Hansen, Principal, Mohave Valley School District, Mohave Valley Junior High
Amy Rendon, Principal, Littleton Elementary School District, Tres Rios Service Academy
Maki Wojcicki, Principal, Wilson School District, Wilson Primary and Wilson Elementary Schools

Changemaker Award (Superintendent)

Dr. Christa DalMolin East, Superintendent, Globe Unified School District
Dr. Carter Davidson, Superintendent, Litchfield Elementary School District
Dr. Gregory Wyman, Superintendent, J.O. Combs Unified School District

Collaborative Leadership Award (School Board Member)

Ed Hermes, School Board Member, Osborn School District
Mitra Khazai, Governing Board President, Madison Elementary School District
Rose Vera, School Board Member, Mohave Valley School District

School Champion of the Year Award (School Champion)

Jennifer Argyros, Program Director – Family Resource Centers, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension (works with the Nogales Unified School District)
Julie Armstrong-Starkey, Community Engagement Coordinator, Laveen School District
Sophie Dessart, Manager - Communications and Public Affairs, Florence Copper (works with the Florence Unified School District)

Because It Takes A Village Award (School)

Buena High School, Principal Nicole Young, Sierra Vista Unified School District
Camp Mohave Elementary School, Principal Rick Cottrell, Mohave Valley School District
Mabel Padgett Elementary School, Principal Leslie Willis, Litchfield Elementary School District

Tickets are available now at schoolconnectaz.org/school-connect-awards.
For media inquiries please contact Danielle Lerner at daniellelernertv@gmail.com.

About School Connect

School Connect is an Arizona nonprofit dedicated to closing equity gaps for Arizona youth through community-driven educational support. Founded on the principle that community collaboration is essential to student success, the organization serves as a catalyst for positive change by connecting community leaders directly with local schools. Since 2014, School Connect has been at the forefront of community-driven educational transformation. In recent years School Connect has impacted 743 schools and over 371,500 Arizona youth with initiatives.