

NEWS RELEASE

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School Connect Announces Arizona's 2026 Champions of Education Award Recipients

Student, School and Community Leaders Honored for Their Impact Across Arizona

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz., April 30, 2026 – Arizona-based nonprofit School Connect brought together educators, students, and community leaders at the Orange Tree Golf Resort in Scottsdale for its 6th Annual Champions of Education Awards on Thursday. The breakfast event honored 15 individuals and organizations for their outstanding contributions to education and community service throughout Arizona.

Eight Education Award winners were selected from 24 statewide finalists, representing individuals from elementary students to superintendents. These honorees lead with heart, inspire those around them, and show what's possible when people come together to support education.

The organization's seven Community Awards highlighted the vital role of businesses, nonprofits, faith leaders, and government in supporting Arizona's youth.

"What I witnessed was something I can only describe as a living picture of what's possible when a whole community decides to show up," said Tracey Beal, Founder and CEO of School Connect. "We had students, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, faith leaders, business partners, nonprofits, and government leaders– all in the same room, all being celebrated for the same reason: because they choose to give themselves, their time and their gifts to those around them."

2026 Education Award Winners

Student Champion of the Year K-6

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

Student Champion of the Year 7-12

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

Hero Maker Award (Teacher)

Jennifer Martinez, Teacher, Alhambra Elementary School District, James W. Rice Elementary School

Catalyst for Education Award (Principal)

Amy Rendon, Principal, Littleton Elementary School District, Tres Rios Service Academy

Changemaker Award (Superintendent)

Dr. Gregory Wyman, Superintendent, J.O. Combs Unified School District

Collaborative Leadership Award (School Board Member)

Mitra Khazai, Governing Board President, Madison Elementary School District

School Champion of the Year Award (School Champion)

Julie Armstrong-Starkey, Community Engagement Coordinator, Laveen School District

Because It Takes A Village Award (School)

Camp Mohave Elementary School, Principal Rick Cottrell, Mohave Valley School District

2026 Community Award Winners

Civic Impact Award (Government): Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego

Community Impact Award (Local Business): CHASSE Building Team, Monica Martinez

Bridge Builders Award (National Business): Homes for Heroes, Laura Roman

Community Spotlight Award (Local Nonprofit): Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation

National Spotlight Award (National Nonprofit): 1 GPA, Christy Knorr and Angela Lechter

Hope Builders Award (Faith Community): The Faithful City, Reverend Dr. Sanghoon Yoo

Founder's Heart Award: Dr. Jennifer Johnson, Chairman of the Board for School Connect

To learn more about this year's finalists and winners, visit schoolconnect.org.

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.