



WHITTIER UNION

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 22, 2025 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Service-Minded California High Health Academy Lead Named Whittier Union's 2025 Teacher of the Year

WHITTIER – California High School Health Academy coordinator and science teacher Laurie Thomas has devoted four decades of her life to inspiring students through hands-on learning, critical thinking, and unwavering support – earning her the title of Whittier Union High School District's (WUHSD) 2025 Teacher of the Year.

Thomas has taught at WUHSD for 25 years, beginning her journey at California High as a physics teacher. Motivated by a desire to help a friend in need, she briefly stepped away from the classroom to attend nursing school, becoming a registered nurse in 2006. When she returned to Whittier Union, Thomas was invited to lead the school's Health Academy.

"I really just love my students," Thomas said. "I often tell them that I'm not just their teacher, I'm their coach, and my job is to help them achieve their goals. I love being able to support them and seeing them succeed."

Under Thomas' leadership, California High's Health Academy has grown into a model program, recognized for providing students with real-world experiences, essential life skills, and professional certifications. As head of the Health Academy, Thomas teaches numerous classes and ensures every Academy student graduates with Professional Rescuer CPR, First Aid, Emergency Medicine training, and either Dental Assisting or Sports Medicine expertise, or a State-Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification. She also coordinates with local medical facilities to provide job shadowing and internship opportunities with partners at TriCities ROP.

Thomas' desire to serve others extends beyond the classroom. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she served at PIH Health, helping administer vaccinations and supporting fellow healthcare workers during a time of urgent need.

"Ms. Thomas embodies everything we hope to see in an educator," California High Principal Shana Jones said. "Her dedication to excellence, coupled with her genuine care for each student, creates a classroom environment where young minds flourish. She doesn't just meet the standard for excellent teaching – she continuously redefines it."

Thomas' colleagues describe her as an exceptional collaborator who challenges and actively engages her students while maintaining high standards and expectations.

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Whether staying late, working weekends when needed, or participating in District best practices, she is committed to ensuring students leave her classroom prepared for success in healthcare careers.

“I’m honestly still so surprised and honored to be named Teacher of the Year,” Thomas said. “There are so many incredible teachers here that I look up to. I love the people I work with and couldn’t have achieved this without my team. It’s not ‘me,’ it’s ‘we.’”

Thomas said she was inspired to become a teacher because she wanted to make a difference in students’ lives and bring them real-world experiences they might not otherwise have. Now, as she prepares to retire at the end of the 2024-25 school year, she reflects on the lasting impact of her work.

“A lot of times, we as teachers don’t realize the impact we have on students,” Thomas said. “Even on hard days, a student might come back and say you’re the reason they chose medicine or biology, and it makes all the difference. Some of my former students have even returned to teach alongside me at California High.”

Outside the classroom, Thomas is a competitive swimmer with the Rose Bowl Masters team and enjoys spending quality time with her family. After retiring from teaching, she plans to explore a return to her work as a registered nurse.

“Congratulations, Ms. Thomas, on this well-deserved honor,” Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo said. “Thank you for your incredible dedication to our students, many years of service to our District, and for doing *Whatever It Takes* to ensure both students and your team are successful.”

PHOTO CAPTION

WUHSD_TOY: California High School Health Academy coordinator and science teacher Laurie Thomas has been named Whittier Union High School District’s 2025 Teacher of the Year for her decades of inspiring students through hands-on learning, critical thinking, and unwavering support.

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OUR MISSION	The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.		
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