



# Fontana Unified School District

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## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Fontana Unified Educator Selected as Finalist for California State Teacher of the Year Award

**FONTANA, CA** – Live Oak Elementary School teacher Michelle Vazquez discovered her calling for teaching and advocacy at a young age, growing up in a family that ran a foster home for adults with special needs.

Vazquez credits her childhood for teaching her the importance of dignity, patience, and creating spaces where everyone feels valued. It's a lesson the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teacher has carried with her throughout her 16-plus years in education. That dedication helped lead to her recognition as Live Oak Elementary and Fontana Unified School District's (FUSD) 2024-25 Teacher of the Year, as well as one of the 2026 San Bernardino Countywide Teachers of the Year. With the county recognition, Vazquez is now a finalist for the 2026 California Department of Education Teacher of the Year award.

"I would not be here if it wasn't for every single person who has supported me throughout my teaching career," said Vazquez, referencing her family and Live Oak Elementary's team of administrators, teachers, staff, and the SELPA department. "These awards truly mean the world to me. I am so humbled and honored just to be recognized. It is overwhelming to know people see my passion and heart for education."

As an RSP teacher, Vazquez supports students in transitional kindergarten through sixth grade who have learning differences and individualized education needs at Live Oak Elementary. She delivers both small-group and one-on-one instruction tailored to each student's academic and behavioral goals, co-teaches in general education classrooms, and collaborates closely with fellow teachers, school administrators, and support professionals.

Vazquez also writes and manages Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and partners with families to ensure students receive the services and accommodations they need to thrive. Through it all, she strives to develop meaningful relationships with her students and help them gain confidence, develop self-advocacy skills, and foster a love for learning.

"Michelle's ability to offer individualized attention and care is where she truly thrives, making a significant difference in her students' academic and personal growth," Live Oak Principal Dr. Patricia Corral said. "She is an exceptional educator who consistently goes above and beyond to support her students and colleagues."

— more —

Outside of Live Oak Elementary, Vazquez shares her expertise as the host of “Stepping into Special Education,” a podcast where she looks to empower special educators worldwide by offering practical strategies and support.

“If there’s one thing I’ve learned over the years, it’s that teaching is rooted in connection and empathy. Every student has unique strengths, challenges, and potential. Our job as educators is to meet them where they are and help them grow,” said Vazquez. “There’s no greater joy than seeing a student’s eyes light up when they grasp something new, or watching them build the confidence to believe in themselves. Teaching is not just a job — it’s a calling. It requires passion, resilience, and a belief in the potential of every single child.”

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**FUSD\_TOY1:** Michelle Vazquez, an RSP teacher at Live Oak Elementary School, has been named Fontana Unified’s Teacher of the Year in 2024-25 and one of the 2026 San Bernardino Countywide Teachers of the Year. She moves on as a finalist for the 2026 California Department of Education Teacher of the Year award.

**FUSD\_TOY2:** Live Oak Elementary School RSP teacher Michelle Vazquez, middle, is honored after being named one of the 2026 San Bernardino Countywide Teachers of the Year. From left: Vazquez is joined by FUSD Interim Executive Director of Human Resources and Live Oak Principal Dr. Patricia Corral, FUSD Superintendent Miki R. Inbody, Associate Superintendent Dr. Douglas Staine, and Executive Director of Human Resources Carol Tomeo.

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