



WHITTIER UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 9, 2026 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Teacher of the Year Awards Recognize Years of Excellence in Education

WHITTIER – Whittier Union recognized years of excellence in education with its 2026 Teacher of the Year selections, honoring a theater and choir director with nearly four decades of experience, and a beloved science teacher who fought a courageous battle with cancer before passing away in the summer of 2025.

La Serna High School visual and performing arts teacher David Carter was named Whittier Union Teacher of the Year while former Pioneer High School science teacher Martin Mathews received a posthumous recognition. Carter was also recognized by Assemblymember Lisa Calderon as a 2026 Educator of Distinction for the 56th Assembly District for his unwavering commitment to providing excellence in education.

"This year, we honor two educators who have made profound impacts throughout the District community," Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo said. "David and Martin have brought so much heart and joy to their classrooms. It's wonderful to see them honored."

Carter came to La Serna in 1989 to teach choir and English. As La Serna's choir director, Carter became involved with the school's theater program, serving as musical director for theater productions. When La Serna's drama teacher left in 2003, Carter said he was ready and eager to step in and fill the role.

As choral director, Carter challenges his students to perform in multiple languages, including Latin, French, German, and Haitian, giving them opportunities to strengthen their language skills while exploring the cultural and historical significance of the art they perform.

In his role as theater director, Carter works to find musicals and plays that offer the greatest challenges to his students, while ensuring the material suits their talents and capabilities. In the past he has directed La Serna students in productions such as "Sweeney Todd," "Ragtime," and "Les Misérables."

Each year, La Serna stages two musicals and one play by William Shakespeare. During the 2024-25 school year, the program brought forth some of its most successful plays, including the electropop opera, "Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812," and "Hamlet."

"Last year was epic for our program," Carter said. "'Great Comet' was led by a brilliant group of singers, one of La Serna's best ever, and we had just the right cast and lead to do 'Hamlet,' which just fell into place. Those shows were the highlight of my career. I am so honored to be recognized as a Whittier Union Teacher of the Year."

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Over the years, Carter has become synonymous with Lancer spirit and pride, deeply appreciated by La Serna administrators and faculty for his commitment to the arts, as well as the entire La Serna community.

“David Carter is the ‘master’ who harnesses the elusive qualities of the arts and molds the talents and gifts of students into complete works of art,” La Serna English teacher Dina Tsuyuki said. “The culture and sophistication that Dave introduces in his classes are unmatched and create an everlasting memory for his students. Dave Carter is truly a treasure.”

Mathews, who came to Pioneer High in the early 2000s, was beloved by students and faculty alike, and is remembered as a colleague, mentor, and friend who brought heart, humor, and wisdom everywhere he went. Mathews taught a variety of classes at Pioneer, including physics, physical science, and Advanced Placement Environmental Science. He also served in several leadership roles, including department chair and District instructional coach. Mathews was known for learning new skills at education conferences, then eagerly implementing and sharing them with colleagues.

To Whittier High School English teacher and Whittier Secondary Education Association (WSEA) President Matt Francev, Mathews was more than a colleague, he was a District leader who helped to shape lives, strengthen communities, and define what education should be, with a legacy of making Pioneer High and Whittier Union better places.

“Martin was a master at his craft and had a passion for education,” Francev said. “Martin was innovative and genuine, a man who knew the power of education, always searching for ways to inspire growth, reaching the highest achievers and those who struggled. To his colleagues, Martin mentored with humility and purpose. He made us better, simply by working alongside him.”

Mathews was stricken by cancer shortly after the 2024-25 school year, but continued to work until just weeks before his death.

“Martin was an exceptionally dedicated educator, a true leader, and a source of inspiration to both students and staff,” Pioneer High Principal Mary Chapman said. “We miss him dearly but are so happy to see that his lifetime of work has been recognized by his peers. His unwavering commitment to his students and generous spirit left a lasting mark on the Pioneer community.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHS_D_TEACHER1: La Serna High School visual and performing arts teacher David Carter receives a recognition plaque after being named Whittier Union Teacher of the Year.

WUHS_D_TEACHER2: Former Pioneer High School science teacher Martin Mathews received a posthumous Whittier Union Teacher of the Year recognition.

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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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