



# HACIENDA LA PUENTE

UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Dec.28, 2021

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## Hacienda La Puente Unified C-STEM Educators Recognized for Excellence by UC Davis

**CITY OF INDUSTRY, CA-** Orange Grove Middle School and Cedarlane Academy math teachers Samantha Higbee and Marissa Blessum have been named Computing, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (C-STEM) Teachers of the Year by the UC Davis C-STEM Center for 2021.

Higbee and Blessum are joined by Rosalie Sinapi, principal at Los Altos Elementary School and Joanne Chan, District coordinator of instruction at Hacienda La Puente Unified School District who were recognized as C-STEM Administrators of the Year.

The UC Davis C-STEM Center's Educator Awards recognize C-STEM instructors, county administrators, volunteers and superintendents from K-12 schools for their success in teaching and integrating computing into STEM subjects.

During the District's initial program launch in 2019, Higbee and Blessum collaborated to learn the C-STEM programs, aiming to transform the math curriculum with hands-on coding and robotics and close the math achievement gap for at-risk students and English language learners.

"Teaching C-STEM is my passion," Blessum said. "I am honored to receive the Teacher of the Year Award alongside my dedicated colleague Samantha Higbee and represent the dynamic C-STEM program at Hacienda La Puente Unified School District."

UC Davis announced the C-STEM Teacher of the Year Award at their annual C-STEM Conference, held virtually Nov. 29 through Dec. 2. The conference celebrated this year's theme of "Accelerated Learning of Math and CS/STEAM."

Higbee and Blessum are well-established members of the Hacienda La Puente Unified School District community. Higbee taught at Valinda School of Academics for eight years and has spent the last 12 years at Orange Grove Middle School teaching sixth- and seventh-grade math, while Blessum has taught seventh-grade math at Cedarlane Academy for 16 years.

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"Marissa and I were in the District's first cohort of teachers to welcome the C-STEM curriculum without any coding experience," Higbee said. "It was overwhelming at first, but with the support of the other new C-STEM teachers, District administrators and the UC Davis training in RoboBlockly and ChIDE programs, we were able to figure out lesson plans that worked for us."

Sinapi has worked in Hacienda La Puente Unified since 1996 and has served as principal at Los Altos Elementary School since 2012. She regularly attends C-STEM meetings, helps develop lesson plans and coaches the school's robotics team.

Chan is celebrating her 21st year with Hacienda La Puente Unified. Since the C-STEM program launch in 2019, she has collaborated with the UC Davis C-STEM Center to support teachers in integrating coding and robotics into math lessons using RoboBlockly and ChIDE.

The supplementary curriculum RoboBlockly and ChIDE features self-guided coding, math activities, and theme-based projects and assists teachers without any prior coding and robotics experience to learn and implement the rigorous curriculum quickly.

"We introduced the program to six middle schools and nine secondary teachers and have since expanded the program to numerous elementary school sites and onboarded many instructors, bringing us to 13 K-8 schools and 48 teachers representing C-STEM at Hacienda La Puente Unified," Chan said.

Each awardee received certificates from UC Davis signed by UC Davis Chancellor Gary May and C-STEM Center Director Harry Cheng; from the California Department of Education signed by State Superintendent of Public Education Tony Thurmond; and from the California State Legislature signed by State Senator Bill Dodd.

"I would like to thank the UC Davis C-STEM Center for their unwavering support across our campuses and congratulate Marissa Blessum, Samantha Higbee, Rosalie Sinapi and Joanne Chan on this well-deserved recognition," Superintendent Dr. Alfonso Jiménez said. "It is an honor to witness our students' growth as they develop pedagogical strategies, valuable skillsets and gain the confidence and determination to succeed in college and beyond."

## PHOTO CAPTION:

**HLPUSD\_C-STEM\_2021:** Hacienda La Puente Unified's sixth- and seventh-grade math teacher at Orange Grove Academy, Sam Higbee, left, and seventh-grade math teacher at Cedarlane Academy, Marissa Blessum, second left, were recognized by the UC Davis C-STEM Center as C-STEM Teachers of the Year. They are joined by the Principal at Los Altos Elementary School, Rosalie Sinapi, second right, and District Coordinator of Instruction, Joanne Chan, right, who were recognized as C-STEM Administrators of the Year, respectively.

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