

Del Mar Union School District announces 2026 Districtwide Employees of the Year



DMUSD recently announced Sarah Grosso (center with honor plaque), first grade teacher at Torrey Hills School, as the 2026 Districtwide Teacher of the Year. (Courtesy of DMUSD)



By **NEWS RELEASE**

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DMUSD recently named Carolyn Liuchan (center with honor plaque), behavior support interventionist at Sycamore Ridge School, as the 2026 Districtwide Classified Employee of the Year. (Courtesy of DMUSD)

The Del Mar Union School District (DMUSD) recently announced Sarah Grosso, first grade teacher at Torrey Hills School, as the 2026 Districtwide Teacher of the Year, and Carolyn Liuchan, behavior support interventionist at Sycamore Ridge School, as the 2026 Districtwide Classified Employee of the Year.

These recognitions reflect the strength and dedication of DMUSD's exceptional staff across all schools and departments. It remains DMUSD's vision and its commitment that every student in DMUSD has an extraordinary educational experience, supported by outstanding professionals in every role. From the classroom to student support services and beyond, DMUSD continues to invest in its people, ensuring students benefit from meaningful, hands-on learning and high-quality instruction grounded in a strong academic core, according to a news release.

Selected from a group of outstanding site and department honorees, both Grosso and Liuchan exemplify the care, expertise, and commitment that define DMUSD's learning community.

Grosso is recognized by her colleagues as a compassionate and thoughtful educator who creates a classroom environment where every student feels seen, supported, and appropriately challenged. She meets students where they are, adapting instruction to support individual learning needs while maintaining high expectations.

Beyond her classroom, she is a collaborative leader who works closely with families, colleagues, and school initiatives, contributing to a positive and connected school community. Her leadership and commitment to student success make a meaningful impact at Torrey Hills School and across the district, the news release stated.

Liuchan is recognized by her colleagues for bringing patience, care, and thoughtful problem-solving to her work with students and staff. In her role, she supports students in developing the skills and confidence needed for success in both classroom and everyday situations. She partners with teachers and staff across campus to help create supportive learning environments and is known for building strong, positive relationships with the students she serves, the news release stated.

“Across our district, we see extraordinary care, expertise, and commitment in every role,” said Marisa Janicek, superintendent, in the news release. “Sarah and Carolyn represent the very best of our team, and their work reflects what is possible when talented educators and staff come together around a shared purpose. We are grateful for the impact they have on students each day and proud to recognize their contributions.”

Each year, school sites recognize a Teacher of the Year who exemplifies excellence in instruction, dedication to students, and a commitment to their school community. DMUSD recently announced its recognition of the following 2026 site Teachers of the Year:

- Ashley Falls School: Kris Pike, 5th grade teacher
- Carmel Del Mar School: Rachel Johnson, speech language pathologist
- Del Mar Heights School: Alison Catilus, 1st grade teacher
- Del Mar Hills School: Colleen Pratt, 6th grade teacher
- Ocean Air School: Dina Balfour, kindergarten teacher
- Pacific Sky School: Audrey Schengel, 2nd grade teacher
- Sage Canyon School: Gina Abbamonte, 4th grade teacher
- Sycamore Ridge School: Emily Mackie, 6th grade teacher
- Torrey Hills School: Sarah Grosso, 1st grade teacher

School sites and departments also recognize a Classified Employee of the Year who exemplifies dedication, professionalism, and a commitment to supporting students and staff. DMUSD recently recognized the following 2026 Classified Employees of the Year:

- Ashley Falls School: Melanie Dixon, special education aide
- Carmel Del Mar School: Lili Hamra, library media specialist
- Del Mar Heights School: Heidi Merkel-Eckstein, library media specialist
- Del Mar Hills School: Jose Casas, plant manager
- Ocean Air School: Cherie Hill, special education aide
- Pacific Sky School: Yvonne Rons, administrative assistant
- Sage Canyon School: Christine Sanchez, administrative assistant
- Sycamore Ridge School: Carolyn Liuchan, behavior support interventionist
- Torrey Hills School: Tiffany Peterson, special education aide
- After School Program: Tiffany Tooker, ASP worker
- Early Childhood Development Center: Nicole Sanders, pre-K teacher
- District Office: Margaritta Fernandez, payroll supervisor
- Child Nutrition Services: Mike Meza, delivery driver

DMUSD stated in the news release that it “extends its congratulations to all of the 2026 honorees and gratitude for the important work they do each day to support students, staff, and school communities across the district.”

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