

News



Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year finalists named



Courtesy Contra Costa Office of Education

Four finalists were named for this year's 2017-2018 Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year competition. Pictured here, last year's celebration dinner, during which two teachers, Shawna Hawes of Valley View Middle School of Pleasant Hill, and Gina Minder-Maldonado of Oakley Elementary School, in Concord were named the county's Teacher of the Year, on Sept. 22, 2016. (Courtesy Contra Costa Office of Education)

By **JOYCE TSAI** | jtsai@bayareanewsgroup.com |
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PLEASANT HILL – Four finalists have been selected in the Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year competition, the county Office of Education announced Monday.

Paula Raj, of West Contra Costa Unified School District, teaches Spanish to ninth to 12th graders at De Anza High School in Richmond. A Brooklyn native, she has been with the high school for the past 21 years.

Kari Stewart, in her 24th year of teaching the Walnut Creek School District, has taught multiple subjects for the past two years at Tice Creek School in Walnut Creek. She previously taught at the school district's Walnut Creek Intermediate and Buena Vista Elementary.

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Tom Trowbridge, a building trades and engineering educator for more than 11 years at Concord High, teaches robotics engineering, civil engineering and architecture, woodworking technology and construction technology. Earlier this year, he and his students made headlines with their low-cost, eco-friendly [tiny home project](#).

Marissa Ware, an 18-year educator, has been teaching kindergarten to third grade at John Baldwin Elementary in Danville for the past six years. During college, while working with an infant-development program, she became fascinated by the development stages of infants and toddlers, and became a teacher.

Two winners will be chosen in late September to represent the county in the state Teacher of the Year competition. Held by the Contra Costa County Office of Education, the contest uses a three-part selection process, which includes a committee of 13 judges, that reviews applications of teachers nominated by school districts. From there, the finalists will be observed in the classroom and judged on five-minute speeches about their teaching philosophy.

The two winners then will be announced at the annual Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year Dinner Celebration on Sept. 28 at the Hilton Concord, in which all 22 district Teacher of the Year winners will be honored.

Tags: [Education](#), [K 12 Education](#)



Joyce Tsai Joyce Tsai covers K-12 education in the East Bay. She has been a reporter for more than 10 years, having covered the business of health care, nonprofits and higher education, as well as breaking crime, the military, Congress and local government. She has lived in the Northeast, Midwest, Deep South and D.C. Beltway, and now is happy to have landed on the West Coast, where she enjoys driving the Pacific Coast Highway and exploring its scenic nooks and crannies whenever she can.

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— Joyce Tsai, Staff