



Press Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RAYTHEON LEADERS IN EDUCATION AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED

TUCSON, Ariz. — Tucson Values Teachers and Raytheon Missiles & Defense today announced the winners of the sixth annual Raytheon Leaders in Education Award. Four local teachers were selected as the recipients and will be honored at Tucson Values Teachers’ [Stand Up 4 Teachers](#) ceremony, scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021.

The Raytheon Leaders in Education Award program recognizes and rewards Pima County teachers in grades PreK-12 who are achieving outstanding classroom performance, demonstrating leadership in their schools and communities, and supporting their peers in a committed teacher workforce. This is the first year that the program is recognizing PreK teachers, offering a new PreK category for early childhood educators.

Through a rigorous evaluation process, judges selected four awardees from among 12 finalists. Raytheon will award the four winners separate \$2,500 gifts, plus an additional \$2,500 in matching gifts to each of the teacher’s respective schools, for a total of \$20,000. The award recipients will meet with local business and political leaders over the next year to share success stories and find common ground in advocating for advancements in education. The eight finalists who were not selected as the winners will receive \$500 each.

“Tucson Values Teachers and Raytheon have enjoyed a long partnership of shining a spotlight on Southern Arizona’s outstanding educators. This year’s Raytheon Leaders in Education Award went to four teachers who have shown leadership in their schools and innovation in their classrooms, benefiting students across the region,” said Andy Heinemann, Chief Executive Officer of Tucson Values Teachers. “Early childhood educators are our students’ first teacher, and we value the foundation that they create for our young learners. For the first time, the Raytheon Leaders in Education Award will recognize a PreK teacher with the award and we’re proud to elevate the work these educators—and all PreK-12 educators—do for our families and our community.”

In addition to honoring the Raytheon Leaders in Education Award winners and finalists, Stand Up 4 Teachers will also feature the presentation of the Spirit of Education Award, recognizing the contributions of Helios Education Foundation.

Stand Up 4 Teachers, presented by Tucson Electric Power, will be an interactive event streamed live from the University of Arizona on Nov. 3. Community members can purchase tickets to attend the event in person or they can participate virtually. Individual in-person tickets are \$75 and can be purchased [online](#). There is no fee to attend virtually but [pre-registration](#) is requested. Stand Up 4 Teachers starts at 5:30pm for cocktails and networking; the program will begin promptly at 6:00pm.

2021 Raytheon Leaders in Education Award Winners:

- **Kristen Kvaran:** PreK, Tanque Verde Community Preschool, Tanque Verde Unified School District

Kristen Kvaran was selected by the Tanque Verde Unified School District to create a new, inclusive preschool for the community. Tanque Verde Community Preschool opened in 2019 and today Kvaran serves as the director and special education teacher. She earned her Master's in Elementary Education at Northern Arizona University and received a post-degree certificate in mild/moderate disabilities. Kvaran first began teaching in 2005, where she spent several years as an elementary school teacher in Atlanta, Georgia and Tucson. As a member of the Tucson Children's Project, Kvaran was chosen to travel to Reggio Emilia, Italy in 2018 to study the world-renowned preschools there. She has shared her experience with other PreK teachers in Tucson, presenting at a Southern Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children conference. Last year, Kvaran was recognized as a United Way Literacy Champion, a title that highlights her dedication to literacy learning.

- **Megan Lehman:** Grade 3, Centennial Elementary School, Flowing Wells Unified School District

Megan Lehman, a third-grade teacher and Reading Lab Specialist, has taught at Centennial Elementary School in Flowing Wells Unified School District for the past 15 years. She was named Centennial Elementary's 2012-2013 Teacher of the Year and the school's Legendary Teacher for 2017-2018. Lehman supports her colleagues as an Instructional Coach to 2nd and 3rd year teachers, and is the Teacher Assistance Team Coordinator, providing assistance to teachers with students who struggle academically, socially, or behaviorally. In addition to her work in the classroom, Lehman coaches cheerleading, is the sponsor of the Kiwanis Kids Club, and is an advisor for Student Council and yearbook.

- **Jennifer Thompson:** Grade 7, Mathematics, Flowing Wells Junior High School, Flowing Wells Unified School District

Jennifer Thompson has taught mathematics for the past 22 years at Flowing Wells Junior High School in the Flowing Wells Unified School District. She earned a Master of Arts in Mathematics Education from the University of Texas at Austin before returning to Tucson. Currently a seventh-grade teacher, Thompson is a member of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. She has presented at conferences around the state and taught Herbst Enrichment Mathematics Seminars for local secondary math teachers at The Center for Recruitment and Retention of Mathematics Teachers. Thompson is an instructor for Teach Arizona's math methods course at the University of Arizona and was the recipient of the 2017 Future Leader Award from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. In 2020, she was recognized as "Teacher of the Year" at Flowing Wells Junior High School.

- **Ernesto Somoza:** Grades 9-12, Graphic and Web Design, Pueblo High School, Tucson Unified School District

Ernesto Somoza has transformed the graphic arts program at Pueblo High School in Tucson Unified School District since he began teaching there in 2015. As the Graphic and Web Design teacher, he has incorporated drones and 3D printing into the classroom, collaborating with colleagues to print 3D figures of amino acids for the biotechnology class and using a drone to

create a runway look for the MakeFashionEdu fashion show. Through the Pueblo 21st Century Community Learning Center program, Somoza created the Tech Warriors Club to support students with these cutting-edge technology tools. Somoza also ran an art competition that focused on the border, eventually projecting student and community art onto the border wall in Nogales, Arizona. In addition to graphic design and technology, Somoza has a passion for nature and physical activity. He started the Hiking Club and the Road Warriors, a biking club that trains to ride in El Tour de Tucson. Somoza also led the planting of 45 trees throughout the Pueblo High School campus and has taken more than 100 students to study the Grand Canyon through his Sierra Club membership.

2021 Raytheon Leaders in Education Award Finalists:

PreK

- **Jessica Jankowski-Gallo:** PreK, Emily Meschter Early Learning Center, Flowing Wells Unified School District
- **Patricia Perez:** PreK, Pueblo Gardens PK-8, Tucson Unified School District

Grades K-5

- **Rachelle Ferris:** Grade 3, Innovation Academy, Amphitheater Public Schools
- **Vanessa Hill:** Grades K-5 gifted education, Rio Vista Elementary School, Amphitheater Public Schools

Grades 6-8

- **Christopher Ryan:** Grade 6, Language Arts, Dodge Traditional Magnet Middle School, Tucson Unified School District
- **Emily Tate:** Grades 7-8, Art/Ceramics, Tortolita Middle School, Marana Unified School District

Grades 9-12

- **Lauren Johnson:** Grades 9 and 12, English Language Arts, Marana High School, Marana Unified School District
- **Jeff Mann:** Grade 9, Social Studies, Flowing Wells High School, Flowing Wells Unified School District

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Tucson Values Teachers (TVT) is a business and education partnership focused on helping schools and districts attract, retain and support the very best teachers for every PreK-12 classroom in Southern Arizona. The organization recognizes the critical role teachers play in student achievement and the vital influence they have on Tucson's future. It does this work by raising public awareness of the value of the teaching profession while providing programs that benefit teachers economically and professionally. For more information and to support TVT, visit tucsonvaluesteachers.org or call (520) 327-7619.