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Region One ESC Announces 2022 Regional Teachers of the Year ***McAllen ISD and La Joya ISD Educators Take Top Honors***

Celebrating the outstanding dedication and commitment of the region's educators, the Region One Education Service Center held its Annual Teacher of the Year recognition dinner on Thursday, August 12, 2021, to honor the region's District Teachers of the Year and to announce the recipients of the Regional Elementary and Secondary Teachers of the Year. In all, 41 District Teachers of the Year, representing 23 school districts/charter schools were honored for their excellence in the classroom.

Jennifer Han, a 4th grade teacher at Juan Seguin Elementary School (McAllen ISD) was named the Regional Elementary Teacher of the Year. Han describes herself as a risk-taker, innovator and agent of classroom's dynamic change. Han recognizes the power of the written word to get to know her students and to give students a voice. "I have learned through the years of being a writing teacher that kids want to be noticed, acknowledged, and liked. They want to share and show us who they are. They love talking about their dreams, families, special talents and things that make them proud. Though not all students may have the ability to glide on paper to express themselves, in my class all students are encouraged to try their best to tell their own story."



Understanding that the students in her classroom come from different backgrounds, Han uses writing to engage and include all students, "No matter if you are a gifted and talented or a special education student, an English as a Second Language or a native student, a student from an affluent or a humble family, writing time is the great equalizer in my class. They are all provided the guidance, the tools and, more importantly, the platform to share their story and be heard."

Maria Moncerrat Reyna, a high school teacher at the Academy for Health Science Professions & STEM (La Joya ISD) was named the Regional Secondary Teacher of the Year. Reyna currently teaches Algebra 2, Pre-AP, and an Avid 3 teacher serving 11th grade students. A chance opportunity by an elementary school teacher who asked if Reyna, a 6th grade student at the time, wanted to



Region One Education Service Center (www.esc1.net) serves over 438,000 students and educators in eight counties in south Texas including Brooks, Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb, Willacy and Zapata counties. Region One works to assist school districts in improving student performance, assist districts to operate more efficiently and economically, and implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or the Commissioner of Education.

tutor younger students ignited her passion to pursue a teaching career. Throughout her school years, Reyna recalls having some of the best teachers that she considers her teacher role models, but it was her father's encouragement and support that was the most influential in her career choice, "This man gave me my first clipboard when I was about 3 years old and taught me how to divide. He later taught me about being strong and how education is the most important asset to secure our future. This man was one of the greatest teachers I've ever known. He was a bus driver for 19 years for La Joya ISD transportation and yet he persuaded me to become a teacher just with his support, tenacity, and example. He may not have studied to be a teacher or had a college degree, but I could not be here today without his guidance, love, and support."

Reyna firmly believes that teachers have a tremendous responsibility to society by nurturing the students in her classroom, "We often take on certain roles such as nurses, counselors, academic advisors, conflict resolution specialists, and role models, for the students we serve. One false move, and a student can be negatively affected for life. One right move, and a student can reach milestones they may have never known existed for them."

Nominees submitted an application consisting of essay questions asking nominees to describe a lesson or unit that defines them as a teacher, describe a project or initiative that has contributed to the improvement of overall school culture, an explanation of how they ensure that education transcends the classroom, what they consider to be a major public education issue, and finally, as a spokesperson for teachers and students what is their message to the profession and to the public. A committee comprised of representatives from various teacher and administrator groups evaluated the essay applications.

Emphasizing that each of the regional teachers of the year are a shining example to their colleagues, each district teacher of the year nominee received a silver star trophy award for their achievement.

Regional Teacher of the Year winners were presented a *Star Polisher Award*, a statue of four children holding a star, by Dr. Eduardo Cancino, Region One ESC Interim Executive Director. Each Regional Teacher of the Year recipient also received a personalized *Teacher of the Year* ring from Jostens, *The Class Ring Company*. Jostens, *The Class Ring Company* has served as a sponsor of the Region One Teacher of the Year celebration for the past 11 years. Additionally, each was awarded a \$100 gift card on behalf of Lone Star National Bank.

Special recognition goes out to Bert Ogden Motors, first year sponsor of the Teacher of the Year.

Each of the state's twenty regional education service centers submit their regional elementary and secondary teachers of the year for the Texas Teacher of the Year award; Region One ESC will nominate Han and Reyna for the Texas Teacher of the Year award. Semi-finalist judging will take place at the Texas Association of School Administrators headquarters in Austin, Texas to determine the six Texas Teacher of the Year finalists. Finalists will be announced on August 16 (tentative date). The Texas Elementary and Texas Secondary Teachers of the Year will be announced on October 15, 2020 at the Texas Teacher of the Year Awards Ceremony in Austin, Texas.