

Charter School Award Winners Announced

Largest Arizona Charter Support Organization Recognizes Top Charter Teachers, Leaders and Schools

Phoenix (October 20, 2014) – The Arizona Charter Schools Association is pleased to announce the 2014 Charter Award winners representing the top charter teacher, leader, business manager and school in Arizona. These schools and educators highlight some of the best of what Arizona’s charter movement has to offer.

The Association is also recognizing the accomplishments of Harry Kressler, Superintendent of Pima Prevention Partnership with three schools in Tucson and Phoenix. Kressler, honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award, is a long-time school leader and true champion of serving Arizona’s most at-risk youth.

The award winners will be honored at the Charter Awards Luncheon on Thursday, Oct. 30 at the Hotel Palomar in Phoenix.

Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Charter Education –



Harry Kressler, Superintendent, Pima Prevention Partnership. While Harry Kressler leads three Pima Partnership schools in Tucson and Phoenix, he also serves as a resource to many others in the charter movement. For the past 23 years, Harry has led Pima Prevention Partnership, a non-profit committed to empowering the most at-risk Arizona youth, serving 12,000 families annually. Almost 15 years ago, Harry saw a critical need for schools to serve the children participating in Pima Prevention Partnerships substance abuse treatment programs. In 2002, Harry founded Pima Prevention High School, followed by Pima Partnership Academy for middle-school children and Arizona Collegiate High School in Phoenix. As Superintendent, he not only serves on the Arizona Charter Schools Association Advisory Leaders Council, but also as a resource to other charter operators, such as the Arizona Autism Charter School. Harry is a true champion for Arizona’s youth and works tirelessly to ensure their best interests are central to every decision made by Pima Prevention Partnership.

2014 Charter School of the Year –



Villa Montessori, a K-8 charter school in Phoenix serving 495 students, was founded in 1965 by a small group of parents committed to bringing Montessori education to the valley. It remained a private school until 1995 when it received a charter from the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools. One of Villa’s signature features is the deep sense of community that exists between students, staff, parents and the board of directors. The school is proud of the longevity of its staff. The average tenure for a classroom teacher is ten years. Villa highly values parent participation and engagement. School staff maintains a strong partnership with parents in the education of their children. The board is comprised of many talented individuals who share their expertise and commitment to Villa’s mission. At the heart

that vision is the Montessori philosophy, which honors each student’s unique path of development. Education is seen not as the imparting of facts, but rather as a transformative process and an aid to life. In an age where education can be reduced to high stakes testing, Villa continues to remain faithful to “growing greatness” in body, mind and spirit.

Finalists: AAEC - SMCC Campus in Phoenix and Mission Montessori Academy in Scottsdale

2014 Charter Transformational Leader of the Year –



Heather Henderson, principal and academic leader at Arizona Charter Academy, a K-12 school serving over 700 students in Surprise. With over 20 years of educational experience in a teaching, administrative and special education capacity, Heather oversees the academic and day-to-day operations of Arizona Charter Academy. Through Heather’s academic vision and support, Arizona Charter Academy rose from a “D” to an “A” in just three years. She bore the weight of each student’s future, and did not let them down. With over 85 percent of students in poverty, Heather believes that zip code should not define the quality of education. Constantly focused on data-driven decision making

and professional development of teachers, Heather is a passionate educator who provides teachers and students with the tools for

success. Heather is committed to leading an academic team to implement a rigorous program committed to doing what is best for students.

Finalists: Alicia Alvarez with Alta Vista High School in Tucson, Nancy Emmons with Horizon Honors Secondary School in Phoenix, Adam Sharp with Reyes Maria Ruiz Leadership Academy in Phoenix and Frank Stripe with Imagine Preparatory at Superstition in Apache Junction.

2014 Charter Business Leader of the Year —



Damon Norris is the Purchasing Manager at Legacy Traditional Schools, a charter network of eight schools throughout Arizona. Damon has intrinsically made the transition from corporate America to K-12 education with his common sense approach to the purchasing process. Whether implementing new systems, negotiating deals, or purchasing toilet paper and textbooks, Damon works diligently to ensure Legacy's 8,000 students and 650 employees are equipped to be successful on campus. Damon always has the best interest of the students at heart and is willing to go the extra mile to ensure that Legacy's schools are properly outfitted to provide the best educational experience possible. Damon has set a

precedent in the purchasing department and lives by the same values as Legacy Traditional Schools, which include honesty, positive attitude, patriotism, and excellence.

Finalists: Melissa Holdaway with Arizona Charter Academy in Surprise and Evelyn Taylor with the Learning Foundation charter network schools in the east Valley.

2014 Charter Teacher of the Year —



Dr. Patricia Pearson is a math teacher at BASIS Chandler. Patti, as she is known to her friends and colleagues, is a founding math teacher at the Chandler campus. Despite earning her doctorate, Patti chose to teach fifth-graders because she recognized that a strong foundation is essential for accessing higher learning. She teaches fifth-grade students concepts that are two years above grade-level, and due to her interactive and engaging teaching style, her students consistently received some of the highest scores on the AIMS exams and last year placed top in the state. Patti develops a positive rapport with students who both respect her and want to do well in her class. In the words of one of

Patti's students, "she teaches her lessons in way that makes everyone interested in math."

Finalists: Linda Foster with Midtown Primary School in Phoenix and Joslyn Maike with Mission Montessori Academy in Scottsdale.

Approved by the state legislature in 1994, charter schools were created to provide a quality choice for Arizona families. To date, Arizona has 618 independently operated, publically funded charter schools that enroll over 190,000 students this school year. Fully, 31 percent of the state's public schools are charter schools, and 17 percent of our public students attend a charter.

In 2014, 73 percent of charter schools with two years of letter grades either improved their letter grade or earned an A (A-Alt) or B (B-Alt). Also, 18 of the top 30 public schools are charter schools.

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For interview requests or if you would like to attend the Awards Ceremony, please contact Megan Gilbertson.

About the Arizona Charter Schools Association

The Arizona Charter Schools Association is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to support student achievement through high-quality charter schools, advocate for student equity and charter school autonomy, and lead Arizona charter schools as a sustainable, strong, credible organization. For more information, visit www.azcharters.org or call 602.944.0644.