

Caruthers Classroom Lures Silicon Valley Engineer

BY Alex Tavlian

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Baljit Gill once had a successful career as a Silicon Valley software engineer that included developing and checking digital content for E! Entertainment Network and Mars candy.

But three years ago, he traded it for a math classroom in a small Valley high school where he believed he could make a difference.

Apparently he has. Earlier this month, Gill, 34, was named the first-ever Outstanding Educator of the Year by the California Teacher Corps. The award was created to recognize those who begin teaching as a second career and serve a high-need public school.



"Receiving the award is motivation to continue to work hard and provide the best learning experience for my students, which will prepare them for life after high school and college," he said.

The process of becoming a teacher was gradual for Gill, who began thinking about a career switch eight years ago. "I had great teachers in my life that influenced me in high school and college," he said. "Sitting behind a desk can make a difference in providing a better product, but it cannot replace working hands-on with kids in a classroom. And that is something I always wanted."

He later enrolled in National University to earn his teaching credential.

Gill headed to Caruthers High School, which he describes as a haven of respectful students.

He's become an integral part of Caruthers' lone high school, which has an enrollment of 531 students. In addition to teaching math, Gill has taken a number of leadership roles at the school, including freshman class adviser, varsity track coach, Punjabi club adviser and junior varsity basketball coach.

"The amount of time and energy Baljit spends at the school and in the community is really impressive," said Caruthers High School Principal Orin Hirschhorn, "The students and our school are the benefactors of his hard work."

For Gill and many other second-career teachers, putting their time and energy into education was their way of providing new learning opportunities to students.

"Gill's spirit and commitment to his students, school and community is representative of teachers who have left the comfort of their careers to serve in high-need public schools throughout the state," California Teacher Corps President Catherine Kearney said.