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Edison High science teacher honored as educator of the year

BY The Business Journal
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NAPA – A Stockton educator has been named the latest recipient of a statewide teachers organization’s award for exemplary work serving a high-need public school.

Nicole Gonzalez, who teaches biology and anatomy at Edison High School in Stockton and who grew up in Manteca, today received the Michael McKibbin Outstanding Educator of the Year Award at the California Teacher Corps conference in Napa. The recipient also must have used an alternative route to certification.

Edison High School serves nearly 2,100 students, more than half of whom receive free or reduced lunch and 97 percent of whom are minorities. As a fluent Spanish speaker and Hispanic adult, Gonzalez is uniquely able to relate to her students and connect learning to the real world, according to the state from the organization.



“We are thrilled to recognize Nicole Gonzalez as the recipient of the 2012 Michael McKibbin Outstanding Educator of the Year Award,” California Teacher Corps Founding President Catherine Kearney said in the statement. “Gonzalez embodies the skill and commitment of all Teacher Corps teachers, more than 55,000 educators who work tirelessly day after day in underserved communities and high-need subjects to serve California students. We know that the right teacher makes all the difference and Gonzalez is the right teacher for the Stockton community.”

Gonzalez attended high school in Manteca and is the oldest of seven children. She decided to pursue teaching after graduating from University of California Santa Barbara with a biology degree. She earned her teaching credential through Project IMPACT, a California Teacher Corps program offered through the Teachers College of San Joaquin and the San Joaquin County Office of Education.

Gonzalez has been a mentor since a young age, beginning with supporting her single father in raising her younger siblings. At Edison High School, Gonzalez has taken on several leadership roles, including developing the Foundations of Health program. Students devote a year to this hands-on study of the human body that combines physics, biology and chemistry in a laboratory setting.

In addition, Gonzalez created the Behavior Intervention Program designed to create steps for early intervention to support at-risk students. With disciplinary administrators and school leadership, Gonzalez leads this unique program that combines mentorship and advocacy to create tailored intervention tactics to meet individual students' unique academic or behavior needs.

"I am honored to accept this award," Gonzalez said in the statement. "I stand as an example to my students that no matter where you come from, you can succeed in life. At the end of the day, if my teaching benefits even one student, then I know I have made an impact. In my role, I can help them realize they can accomplish anything."

Gonzalez is currently earning her master's degree at the Teachers College of San Joaquin, California's first college of education focused solely on training educators to implement K-12 school reform, including career-oriented teaching models that prepare students for both college and career. Through her studies, Gonzalez is further advancing her ability to connect science with the real world, collaborating with colleagues to work across subject matters to create engaging lessons. Gonzalez partnered with math, history and English teachers to develop a unit about determining prescription dosage for medicine. This tied the real-life medical profession with school curriculum and was successful in engaging students.

The California Teacher Corps was formed to meet the future demand for teachers in the state's public schools, particularly in underserved communities and in high-need subjects. Teacher Corps programs recruit and train second-career professionals and other content experts to serve in hard-to-staff schools, as well as to meet the critical need for math, science and special education teachers. California faces a critical shortage of science teachers, both in urban communities and the state's more rural districts.

The Michael McKibbin Outstanding Educator Award is named in honor of Michael McKibbin, a strong advocate for alternative route to certification programs in California. McKibbin was instrumental in establishing and supporting the alternative pathway through more than two decades of working with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

This award was presented at the second annual California Teacher Corps Conference, held in Napa Thursday and today (Feb. 10). The keynote speaker was Kaya Henderson, chancellor of Washington, D.C., Public Schools and the conference included panels, workshops and other speakers.

The California Teacher Corps is a nonprofit organization established in 2009 with the goal of placing 100,000 highly-qualified teachers in California's communities by 2020. The Teacher Corps provides a unified voice for the state's alternative certification programs, effectively and proactively addresses teacher preparation issues facing California and recruits the best and the brightest professionals to teach in the public schools that need them most.

The Teachers College of San Joaquin was established by the San Joaquin Office of Education in 2009 as California's first graduate school to be established through a county office of

education. Teachers College's mission is to develop a new generation of teachers and school leaders that are able to connect high-quality academics with career-technical education, preparing California's students for both career and college. Teachers College currently serves more than 150 graduate students from across Northern California with an esteemed faculty of practitioners who are experts in their specialty.