

Thinking alternatively: LCDS reaps the honors

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May 3, 2024

LINDSAY - The stigma surrounding alternative education is changing Lindsay Community Day School now that the school has been recognized as a model school through the California Department of Education. Not only did LCDS receive the inaugural award, but two of the school's staff members also received prestigious awards from California Continuation Education Association Plus for their dedication and commitment to education and the students they interact with each day.

When the state opened up a new program category for model community day schools for award recognition, Principal of Alternative Education Amalia Lopez knew she had to submit LCDS. Lopez is also the principal of Loma Vista Charter School, Lindsay Adult School, and John J. Cairns Continuation High School which was recognized by the state as a model school last year.

After a rigorous application and review process, LCDS was recognized with the 2024 CDE Model School award. The process included submitting an outline of how the school serves its students' social, emotional, and educational needs, and how students and staff are pushed toward success. After the application was approved, a team from the state visited LCDS for a site review to make sure the outline submitted wasn't just a ruse.

"Kids in Alternative Education are disenfranchised," said Lopez. "They are not seen, and my only job as an administrator for both the kids and the staff is to bring them some dignity and some visibility and some equity. This award brings recognition to Lindsay Unified as a place that continues to serve learners when they've ended up in Alternative Education for different reasons. It doesn't mean that we should stop serving them, so it brings recognition that some of our hardest spaces are some of our best spaces."

This year, the state awards didn't stop with LCDS. Lopez was recognized as the 2024 California Continuation Education Association Plus (CCEA+) Region 3 Administrator of the Year, and Lana Jimenez, Science Learning Facilitator at LCSD, was awarded the 2024 CCEA+ Region 3 Teacher of the Year. Both women said the recognition was humbling and they have continued working in education to encourage the younger generations to explore their educational and potential career options.

Lopez, who has worked with Lindsay Unified School District for 15 years, was submitted for the award by School Resource Officer Adriana Nave. Jimenez, who has taught for 28 years, was submitted by Lopez. The submittal process includes gathering responses from staff and students who work directly with the nominees.

"It's an honor because I know that the award represents voices being submitted on my behalf," said Lopez. "At the end of the day, we're all here to serve the kids and if I'm going to be honored I want it to be because I've done the best I can and I will continue to do the best I can to serve kids here."

Jimenez says she felt sanctioned by the recognition as she works every day to support her students with quality teachings despite having found themselves in Alternative Education.

"I also have to agree with it being humbling, but I think it's a little bit empowering that we've worked so hard, and it's not just me," said Jimenez. "It's finding ways to engage our learners because prior to coming to us the system didn't work for them. So being able to have that opportunity to really engage them, build up their skills so that they feel confident here at school, and to excite them about learning."

Lopez and Jimenez agreed the work doesn't stop and they will continue to support their students as best they can. The love for their jobs and their students was evident as they walked through the office addressing each student and staff member by name and with smiling, friendly faces. Lopez plans to apply for an exemplary program award next year to further highlight the work done within the Lindsay Unified School District's Alternative Education schools.

"I would say that Lindsay Unified is proud of its Alternative Education," said Lopez. "We have immense support from the district cabinet, the Board of Trustees, and the community. We are continuing to change the narrative about what these schools do, who they serve, and the hope and the opportunity that these learners deserve."