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State Schools Chief Jack O'Connell Congratulates 2008-09 National Finalists from California for Prestigious National Teaching Award
Also announces 2009-10 state nominees for consideration in next year's award

SACRAMENTO — State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell congratulated two outstanding California primary teachers named along with 87 other educators nationwide, as national award recipients of the prestigious 2008-09 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST).

Charles Reynes is an itinerant science teacher working at five different elementary schools in the Castro Valley Unified School District in Alameda County. Susan Marie Kunze is a second grade mathematics teacher at Elm Street Elementary in the Bishop Union Elementary School District in Inyo County.

"Congratulations to Mr. Reynes and Ms. Kunze for this extraordinary national honor," said O'Connell. "They both are very committed educators and have a deep understanding of their subject matter. They have developed effective strategies to help students learn how to think in the abstract and relate this to math and science. These critical thinking skills are essential for future success in the global economy."

"There is no higher calling than furthering the educational advancement of our nation's young people and encouraging and inspiring our next generation of leaders," said President Barack Obama in a statement released by The White House. "These awards represent a heartfelt salute of appreciation to a remarkable group of individuals who have devoted their lives and careers to helping others and in doing so have helped us all."

The National Science Foundation administers PAEMST on behalf of The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. PAEMST is the highest recognition that a kindergarten through twelfth grade mathematics or science

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teacher may receive for outstanding teaching in the United States. PAEMST was enacted by Congress in 1983 and authorizes the President each year to bestow up to 108 awards. PAEMST awards primary and secondary teachers in alternate years.

Awards are given to mathematics and science teachers from each of the 50 states and four U.S. jurisdictions including Washington, D.C.; Puerto Rico; Department of Defense Schools; and the U.S. territories. Since the program's inception, 80 California teachers have been named PAEMST recipients. Teachers are recognized for their outstanding contributions to teaching and learning and their ability to help students make progress in mathematics and science.

Reynes and Kunze will receive a citation signed by the President, paid trips to Washington, D.C. to attend a series of recognition events and professional development opportunities, gifts from program sponsors from around the country, and a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation. For more information on the winning teaching strategies of Kunze, please visit www.cde.ca.gov/152515; and for Reynes, www.cde.ca.gov/152514.

O'Connell also announced four California secondary teachers were selected by their peers to represent California as the 2009-10 state nominees for the PAEMST award.

The mathematics nominees are Michelle Katz and Sean Nank. Katz teaches at Northridge Academy High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles County. Nank teaches at El Camino High School, Oceanside Unified School District, San Diego County. ***The two science nominees are Mark Fairbank and Arlene Laurison. Fairbank teaches at Paso Robles High School in the Paso Robles Joint Unified School District, San Luis Obispo County.*** Laurison teaches at Sheldon High School in the Elk Grove Unified School District, Sacramento County.

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“I am very pleased to recommend these extraordinary California teachers to the National Science Foundation for consideration for this prestigious national award,” said O’Connell. “Although only one of them may win in each discipline, they actually represent all of the state’s nearly 307,000 dedicated teachers who put their heart and soul into their jobs every day to prepare our children for our hypercompetitive economy.

“All four outstanding educators demonstrate a substantial and deep understanding of their content. They all developed effective strategies of extending and enhancing student learning, and use assessments to improve their classroom instruction.”

The first mathematics nominee, Katz, has 27 years of teaching experience. She currently teaches algebra to ninth and tenth grade students, and advanced placement calculus to eleventh and twelfth grade students.

“Mrs. Katz came up with an innovative use of graphics that gives students a visual representation of how math works,” added O’Connell. “She also had children learning in cooperative groups so they could help each other and be exposed to other students with different skills and experiences.”

The second mathematics nominee, Nank, has 12 years of teaching experience. He currently teaches Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II courses.

“Dr. Nank also has his students work in groups because he found they learn better when they can talk to their peers,” added O’Connell. “Then instead of performing equations, he would talk to his students about how concepts work and how they can be related to math.”

The selection of Katz and Nank was a joint effort by the California Mathematics Council and the California Department of Education. The membership organization of mathematics educators believes all students have the capacity to become competent and confident in mathematics when provided a rigorous and challenging program supported by high expectations. The group is committed to promoting professional activities that will ensure continual improvement toward excellence in the teaching of mathematics. The Council is

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also committed to communicating with educators, parents, the public, and legislative bodies concerning issues related to teaching rigorous, challenging mathematics.

The first science nominee, Fairbank, has been with the Paso Robles High School since 1984. He teaches physics, earth science, chemistry, and physical science. Fairbank has a National Board Certification in science education.

“Mr. Fairbank integrates popular culture with learning that captures the imagination of his students,” added O’Connell. “His use of a toy Kermit the Frog singing ‘The Rainbow Connection’ while mixing a solution to create a rainbow of colors can be quite an entertaining learning experience for students.”

The second science nominee, Laurison, began her career as a senior scientist, supervising organic chemistry laboratories in the private industry. In 1997, she made a mid-career change and began teaching advanced placement chemistry at Sheldon High School.

“I applaud people like Ms. Laurison who are drawn to the teaching profession and bring their experiences from the private sector into the classroom,” noted O’Connell. “She also has students work in small teams where they may collaborate and solve problems as a group. The students get hands-on experience where they learn by doing, and so they are more engaged in the learning experience.”

The California Department of Education partnered with the California Science Teachers Association to recruit and select outstanding science teachers for the PAEMST program. The California Science Teachers Association includes members who teach at every level from kindergarten through post-graduate university programs. The group seeks to promote and support all aspects of science education in California. Each year, the Association sponsors the nation’s largest state conference for science educators featuring more than 300 hands-on workshops and demonstrations from hundreds of science-oriented companies.

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For more information about PAEMST, please visit www.paemst.org. For contact information for the national finalists and the state nominees, please contact the California Department of Education's Communications Division at 916-319-0818.

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