

# Avenal High School 2023 Achievement Awards December 2023

## SUMMARY

Avenal High School of the Reef-Sunset Unified School District has been awarded two important recognition awards in 2023. The Exemplary Dual Enrollment & Distinguished California Partnership Academy Award is for participation in pre-college and career opportunities for students. Avenal High School also has three individual staff members who have been singled out for the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) Lighthouse Award.

## BACKGROUND

Reef-Sunset Unified School District serves more than 2,660 students. There is one pre-school, three primary schools, one middle school, two high schools and an adult school.

Avenal High School received an award in 2023 from the California Department of Education for exemplary dual enrollment. This award recognizes the school for their quality, equity driven dual enrollment programming. The school will hold the title for two years.

Avenal High School received the title of Distinguished California Partnership Academy for their Wonderful Agriculture Career Preparatory Program.

Three staff at Avenal High School have been awarded a Lighthouse Award: Principal Silvia Maldonado, Assistant Principal Victoria Gornick and Teacher Antonio Silva. The SDCOE Lighthouse Award is given to people who are beacons in the educational community by channeling and leading others in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## METHODOLOGY

Interviews by the Grand Jury were held with staff from Reef-Sunset Unified School District on November 13, 2023, at which time the two awards were explained in detail.

Awards were presented at the Reef-Sunset Unified School District Board of Trustees meeting on November 16, 2023, at which time each recipient was given credit for their exemplary work on this project.

Research from the internet included public statements, notices, and school publications from Avenal High School and the Reef-Sunset Unified School District. SDCOE information was obtained from their website.

## DISCUSSION

Avenal High School is ranked 1,150<sup>th</sup> of the 1,672 California public high schools according to the California State Department of Education. The Advanced Placement participation rate is 30%. The total minority enrollment is 97% (96.5% Hispanic, and .5% Asian) at Avenal High School. 95% of students are economically disadvantaged according to the Avenal High School webpage.

Avenal High School began its dual enrollment courses in the 2014-2015 academic year. 47% of Avenal High School students are enrolled in dual enrollment. This program provides students with the opportunity to earn college credit and high school A-G (A-G requirements are a sequence of high school courses that represent the basic level of academic preparation for post-secondary education. Each subject requires a certain number of years of study and a passing grade of C or better). Credit is given by taking University of California /California State University (UC/CSU) transferable college courses. The classes are taught by California Community College's West Hills Community College District, Coalinga Campus instructors. Instruction takes place face to face on the Avenal High School campus.

Currently there are 18 sections of dual enrollment courses available on the Avenal High campus. Included are Student Development, English 1A, Statistics, Communications, Political Science, Biology, Chemistry, Business, Economics, Health, Crop Science, U.S. History, World History, Soil Science and Art.

The Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep Program allows students to graduate from high school with up to two years of tuition-free college coursework. This allows students to earn an associate degree (65 college credits) and over 200 hours of employment experience. At graduation, students may choose to enter the skilled workforce with a guaranteed job, continue at a community college, or enroll at a four-year college or university as a junior. This program is accessible to all students. There are no selection criteria to take part. This award is bestowed based on strict adherence to the California Partnership Academy model, implementation of all model components, known best practices, and provides opportunities for students to go above and beyond those required by the State of California Education Department. Avenal High was selected as a California Partnership Academy out of 400 schools in the state.

At this time, 95% of students enrolled in the Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep Program are first generation college candidates and are 95% Latino or African American. Almost half of the 762-student body participates in the dual enrollment courses. 26% of those registered with the dual enrollment courses are also enrolled in the Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep Program.

The SDCOE Lighthouse Award is given annually to people who are beacons in the educational community by leading others in diversity, equity, and inclusion. The philosophy of the Lighthouse Awards are as follows:

*“A Lighthouse helps guide navigation and often provides a beacon of hope as we sail through potentially rough waters. Our challenges may be financial, personal, business, or spiritual in nature. The lighthouse metaphor speaks of safety and security in the face of adversity and challenge in a unique way.”*

*“Nominees should actively promote the concept of diversity, equity, and inclusion by positively enhancing or contribution to the overall environment and achievements of students.”*

The (SDCOE) Lighthouse Award has recently added a 7th category to recognize an equity champion outside of San Diego County.

The categories are as follows:

- 1) **Excellence in School Site Leadership** award goes to a school administrator who fosters and leads equitable outcomes for all learners and has been a beacon of light for an entire community.
  - a. Builds on student’s languages and cultures, celebrates the strengths, gifts, and talents.
  - b. Increases positive representation.
  - c. Shares power intentionally with parents and communities.
- 2) **Excellence in Teaching and Learning** award is for a classroom teacher who embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion and has helped achieve positive social and academic outcomes for all students.
  - a. Highlights and honors the contributions of all cultures.
  - b. Ensures positive representation in the classroom and curriculum.
  - c. Cultivates a restorative, student-centered classroom culture.
- 3) **Excellence in Student Support** award goes to a school counselor, social worker, nurse, school psychologist, paraprofessional, or others who actively supports all students, in pursuit of academic and/or social emotional excellence.
  - a. Serves, inspires, and empowers through their own examples.
  - b. Implements and sustains positive changes that benefit those they serve.
  - c. Creates equitable access with consistently strong outcomes for all students, paying special attention to the needs of historically marginalized populations.
- 4) **Equity Champion** award is presented to a district administrator who encompasses the light necessary for people to come together and create multiple opportunities for all students and families in pursuit of equitable outcomes.
  - a. Services, inspires, and empowers through their own examples.
  - b. Implements and sustains positive changes that benefit those they serve.
  - c. Creates equitable access with consistently strong outcomes for all students, paying special attention to the needs of historically marginalized populations.
- 5) **The No Place for Hate® Leader** award goes to an active staff member of their school’s No Place for Hate® committee and demonstrates leadership in their role on the committee and throughout the school community. This person embodies the values laid out in ADL’s No Place for Hate® pledge and has continued to put the commitment of No Place for Hate® at the forefront of their school community even in these challenging times.
  - a. Builds a learning community of inclusivity, respect, and equity.
  - b. Uses the power of peer influence for good.
  - c. Challenges bias and bullying.

- 6) **Student Equity Leadership** award goes to an individual student or student group who advances diversity, equity, and inclusion, and has led meaningful and significant equity initiative in their school community.
  - a. Creates intentional spaces for students to engage in and lead dialogue, solve problems, and learn together about issues of equity.
  - b. Participates in healthy feedback loops between students and adults.
  - c. Increase understanding and honor the identities and cultures of students.
  
- 7) **Equity Excellence (out of San Diego County)** award goes to a teacher, administrator, support staff whose work exemplifies excellence in creating access and opportunities for all students.
  - a. Highlights and honors the contributions of all cultures.
  - b. Implements and sustains positive changes that benefit those they serve.
  - c. Creates equitable access with consistently strong outcomes for all students, paying special attention to the needs of historically marginalized populations.

Teaching has become a challenging field where teachers are coping with stress, burnout, limited resources, being at the center of political discourse, and feeling undervalued. According to the HMH-Education and Learning Technology Company.com, part of the solution is for teachers to engage in self-care and be reminded of their best qualities such as:

- Demonstrating selflessness
- Guiding others through uncertainty
- Being constant and consistent
- Turning doubts into destinations
- Seeing possibilities over circumstances
- Having the courage to encourage
- Embodying innovation
- Empowering and inspiring through example
- Exemplifying a spirit of resilience
- Seeing beyond the surface

Three of Avenal High School staff - Two administrative staff and one teacher were awarded the SDCOE Category #7 Lighthouse Award in November of 2023. This is quite an accomplishment according to district personnel.

## FINDINGS

F1. The Dual Enrollment Program is an important way to expand educational opportunities, improve the community, and improve economic mobility while helping to meet California's growing workforce needs.

F2. Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep Program allows first-generation students to receive a head start on their college education and create a culture of high expectations for the community.

F3. Two of Avenal High School administrators and one teacher were awarded the SDCOE (Category #7) Lighthouse Award in November of 2023.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. Avenal High School administration and staff continue to support their students with programs and services which lead to academic excellence.

R2. Avenal High School administration and staff should continue to work with the Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep Program which provides educational opportunities for Avenal High School students.

R3. Reef-Sunset Unified School District should provide public recognition for these achievements both for students and staff. The Kings County Civil Grand Jury commends Avenal High School administrative staff and teachers for their outstanding achievements and hard work.

## REQUIRED RESPONSE

Pursuant to Penal Code Section §933 (c), provided in part: “No later than 90 days after the Grand Jury Submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body and every elected county officer or agency head for which the Grand Jury had responsibility pursuant to Section §914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court...”

Reef-Sunset Unified School District Board of Trustees  
Reef-Sunset Unified School District  
205 N. Park Avenue  
Avenal, CA 93204

## INVITED RESPONSES

Principal of Avenal High School  
Reef-Sunset Unified School District  
601 Mariposa Street  
Avenal, CA 93204

Original to:  
Judge Jennifer Giuliani, Presiding Judge  
Kings County Superior Court  
1640 Kings Court Drive  
Hanford, CA 93230

Copy to:  
Kings County Civil Grand Jury  
P O Box #1562  
Hanford, CA 93230