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## Lafayette teacher a finalist for County Teacher of the Year

By Pippa Fisher



Christina Nitsos is a first grade teacher at Lafayette Elementary School. Photo provided

A Lafayette teacher has made it into the final four under consideration for a top educator award.

In late May the Contra Costa County 2020-21 Teacher of the Year nominations were narrowed down from 22 nominees to four finalists, including Lafayette Elementary School's first-grade teacher Christina Nitsos.

Nitsos has worked all her 17 years in education in the Lafayette School District as a teacher in first grade and kindergarten and also as an English language learner teacher. Lafayette Elementary School Principal Ann Kim explains Nitsos was among the first teachers from Lafayette to attend the Teachers College Reading and Writing Program in June 2013, attended summer institutes in 2015 and 2016 and was an early implementer of the Phonics Units of Study.

"She has the ability to navigate challenging situations with calm, grace, and ease and when teachers have questions or need support, it's Christina whom they seek out for advice and feedback," says Kim.

Kim notes that Nitsos has served on the school site council, district dialogue committee and principal's advisory team. She is an integral part of the Lafayette District's Math Professional Learning Community.

Nitsos' skills extend far beyond her own school. She is a research advisor at Saint Mary's College, supporting graduate students and works to support five urban schools with early literacy. She is a senior member of Teach Plus Fellow where she reviews and gives feedback on legislation, advocating for students with special needs, and for the need for strong pre-service programs for teachers.

Lafayette School District Governing Board Member Rob Sturm has observed over the years that a common theme for all Teacher of the Year finalists is that their civic and betterment activities extend even beyond teaching and broadly inspire everyone within their expansive orbits - teachers, youth, the local community - to be and do their best.

"Teaching is truly one of the most noble professions and the process of selecting our county's Teacher of the Year is particularly rigorous," says Sturm. "Our county has so many outstanding instructors and yet there can only be four finalists; each one is inspiring, passionate about teaching and learning, and has special abilities to bring out the best in their students. We are so fortunate to have Christina Nitsos as a member of the Lafayette School District family, working tirelessly on behalf of our children."

The Teacher of the Year program is coordinated by the Contra Costa County Office of Education, combining a three-step process, but was slightly changed this year due to COVID-19. School districts nominated teachers in late April/early May. Over June and July interviews and speech presentations will take place before a panel of judges consisting of educators, business, and public-sector representatives via Zoom.

At this time it is uncertain if the traditional gala event to honor the teachers will be possible but the county will be announcing the two county Teachers of the Year via a news release in September.

Reach the reporter at: [pippa@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:pippa@lamorindaweekly.com)

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