

# TOP 25 TEACHERS OF ORANGE COUNTY



Their school administrators describe what makes them the best in their class

# TEACHERS COUNTY 2016

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With over 125 principals and school superintendents taking the time to write essays to sing the praises of talented teachers of Orange County, our job was not easy this year. From mummifying chickens during an Egypt chapter to desks tossed on their sides to ward off paper-ball-mortars during a classroom “trench warfare” conflict — these educators went above and beyond using creativity to truly engage students in lessons they would remember long after walking through those school doors into the future. From sacrificed Spring Break vacations to weekend visits to the classroom to prep for the following week, the sheer amount of hours these professionals put in to ensure our kids are sent out into the world to be the best humans they can be is incredible. Orange County is simply a better place for their efforts and we are thrilled to have a platform to celebrate such hard work and dedication.

Meet all of our 2016 nominees at [www.parentingoc.com](http://www.parentingoc.com)



TOP TEACHER OF OC 2016

# Joan Cowan

*Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Anaheim*

Joan Cowan has been teaching elementary school for 28 years, and every day in her classroom is like a master class in effective, joyful instruction. She is respected as a leader throughout the Magnolia School District, regularly presenting at Staff Development trainings and workshops. Over the years, Joan has probably been on every educational committee in existence: Leadership, Social Committee, Curriculum Adoption Committees, and the Positive Behavior committee are just a few. She is always willing to share her insight and knowledge with others, often guiding student teachers as they begin their careers, with more than one of our District's exemplary teachers citing Joan Cowan as the source of their success. Veteran teachers bring visitors from other Districts to see Joan teach, and in the process learn some new strategies themselves.

However, the place where Joan truly shines is with her students. The children are greeted every day with enthusiasm and a genuine smile. She provides a nearly perfect balance of high expectations with emotional and academic support for her students. Over 60% of Schweitzer students are English Learners, and over 90% of students are Socio-Economically Disadvantaged. 24% are classified

McKinney Vento (homeless or unstable housing). When kindergarten teachers identify students as emotionally or academically struggling, their first choice of placement for the next year is Joan.

The front row of her carpet is 'By Invitation Only' for first graders who are treated like VIPs, while they receive the extra TLC they need. Recently, one of her students was having a terrible day and finally decided to curl up in a little ball in the hallway. Joan sat down right next to him on the cold concrete and patted his shoulder while simultaneously giving directions to the class to get started on the next activity.

Joan cares deeply for her students, and knows that making them successful academically is the greatest gift she can give them. Before there were Professional Learning Communities, Joan led her grade level team in looking at student data. All first graders are her students, and she selects the students with the lowest reading scores to teach during daily intervention groups. The first grade scores at Schweitzer regularly outperform comparable schools in the District, with credit going to Joan and her team. She is an energetic, funny, caring teacher, who wants nothing more than to continue improving children's lives.



## Helen Dowser — FINALIST

*Orangewood Academy, Garden Grove*

Helen Dowser has taught for 43 years, 33 at Orangewood. The first to school and often the last to leave, Dowser was using differentiated instruction before the term was coined. In AP Biology, students dissect a cat and travel to compare the dissolved oxygen between the Santa Ana River and the mouth of the Pacific. In Anatomy and Physiology class, bone and brain dissections are followed by student-designed brochures of the diseases of the muscular skeletal system. In Biology, a week-long field trip to Zion National Park in Utah to do “Quad Studies” comparing ecosystems by in-depth comparison of biotic and abiotic factors follows a campus of students armed with old-fashioned butterfly nets, catching bugs for their insect project. Helen’s classroom is always open for extra tutoring help, or just to talk about life.

## John Ebbe — FINALIST

*Servite High School, Anaheim*

In 40 years, John Ebbe has inspired generations of students. History was an epic narrative, an action adventure of romance and tragedy with John impersonating all the historical players involved. Students could not bear to miss a single day, desperate to hear what would happen next. Great historical figures — Washington, Frederick Douglas, Susan B. Anthony — were not statues simply to be revered, but real humans with shortcomings and virtue, making his students think that did not have to be perfect to have a positive impact on their communities. Student success came not only via Advanced Placement Exams (often 100% pass rates), but in formative lessons; the significance of dressing how you want to be treated, the dangers of underage drinking, that procrastination is a sin, the value of one’s words and promises, among others. Ebbe is a resource woven into the school fabric; coaching, moderating numerous clubs, and mentoring new teachers.



## Janet Smith — FINALIST

*Mabel L. Pendleton, Buena Park*

Whenever there is a need on campus, Jan Smith is always the first to say, “I can do it.” And she can. Smith is paving the way with STEM projects, spearheading an Eco-School initiative, fearlessly diving into 21st Century instruction, and mentoring struggling students. She works tirelessly to ensure that all students, not just her own, have the ability to attend science camp regardless of economic background. She wrangles up sleeping bags and jackets for kids who can’t afford them and tirelessly fundraises with students to raise money for camp tuition. Smith uses her own money to store and care for the items she collects, so they can be used again and again for future students. She works to provide backpacks and supplies for students who need them, and works fundraisers in order to supply scholarships to promising young teachers.



## Bruno Thomas — FINALIST

*International School of Los Angeles, Orange*

Entering Monsieur Thomas’ fourth grade classroom, you find, “*J’entends, j’oublie. Je vois, je me souviens. Je fais, je comprends*” in bold letters. Confucius’ “I hear, and I forget; I see, and I remember; I do, and I understand” is the philosophy of a classroom with a corner of beanbag chairs and cushions where students can “relax” after finishing their work, enjoying brainteasers, coding, puzzles and mandala coloring. The classroom is either a buzzing beehive or a Zen garden where deep thinkers might be found, pondering life. When tragic terrorist events unfolded in Paris, the former French Alps Ski Instructor engaged students at their own level, helping them cope while showing their support by drawing posters in his art class. His students benefit from enriching events like the Time Capsule Overnight field trip with the Ocean Institute and the SCORE program with the Anaheim Ducks, where OC fourth graders compete in an annual street hockey tournament.

