

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools*

## news galleryweek

June 15, 2022

### **TCOE welcomes Dedi Somavia, Chris Meyer**

This summer, the Tulare County Office of Education will welcome two new administrators to the Human Resources Division. Dedi Somavia will be TCOE's new Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, while Chris Meyer will be the new Director of Human Resources and Risk Management. John Rodriguez, who oversaw Human Resources since 2012, is retiring in July.

"We are delighted to welcome Dedi and Chris to TCOE," said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. "Both have extensive experience in human resources and education – as teachers, principals, and administrators. Their addition to our Human Resources Division will increase our capacity to serve TCOE staff and programs, and expand our support to Tulare County school districts."

Dedi Somavia is the assistant superintendent of Human Resources Development for Visalia Unified School District (VUSD) and has been part of VUSD since 2001. Prior to being an assistant superintendent at VUSD, she was an administrator for Human Resources Development. She was also a principal for Crestwood Elementary School; an assistant principal for Fairview Elementary School and Crowley Elementary School, respectively; and a teacher, curriculum coach and principal designee for Elbow Creek Elementary School. Somavia began her career in education as an elementary school teacher in Fresno Unified School District. She was chosen the Association of California School Administrator's Administrator of the Year for Personnel/Human Resources in 2019.



On her new role, Somavia said, "I am humbled to have been selected as the Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources for Tulare County Office of Education. I am excited for the opportunity to serve the students, staff, and community in this new role."

Chris Meyer has served as the superintendent of Monson-Sultana Joint Union School District since 2015. Prior to his time at Monson-Sultana, Meyer served Dinuba Unified School District as a principal of Dinuba High School and Jefferson Elementary School. At Jefferson, he was also a learning director and academic coach. Meyer began his career in education as a teacher with Lincoln Elementary School in Dinuba.

“I look forward to joining the great team at TCOE and continuing to serve staff and students across the county,” Meyer said.



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## Retirees honored for service to Tulare County students and schools

Last week, a number of employees who have retired or plan to retire this month attended a meeting of the Tulare County Board of Education where they were congratulated on their years of service to TCOE. This year, a total of 28 teachers, administrators, and support staff retired with over 600 years of service to Tulare County students and school districts.

“In the classroom or in the administration building supporting the work of Tulare County teachers and districts, this year’s retirees provided remarkable service,” said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. “They have left a lasting legacy on Tulare County families. We wish each of them a happy and healthy retirement!”

### 2021-2022 Tulare County Office of Education Retirees

#### **Cherí Barnes, Human Resources Analyst, Human Resources, 26 years**

As an analyst for the Tulare County Office of Education’s Human Resources Division, Cherí Barnes provided TCOE administrators the support they need for hiring, negotiations, policies and procedures, and leaves of absence. Barnes was praised by her coworkers for her natural ability to problem-solve and her initiative to make her staff more accessible to TCOE program managers. Tulare County school districts often sought her guidance when researching human resources policies and procedures. Barnes led the



department's recruitment efforts by developing job notices and screening the applications to ensure candidates met the requirements. Barnes was the 2012 School Employee of the Year through the annual Excellence in Education program.

**Nancy Bellin, Special Events Coordinator,  
Administration, 43 years**

Nancy Bellin worked for TCOE for a total of 43 years, retiring for the first time in 1999 after 20 years with three different programs – Instructional Services, Educational Resource Services, and Special Services. A few months later, then County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak invited her to return to run the new Tulare County Spelling Championship, which she did for the first time in 2000. She also continued to run Poetry & Prose On Stage, a program she created over 38 years ago. Today, Poetry & Prose is TCOE's largest student event – annually hosting over 1,400 K-8 students over several days. For many years, Bellin also coordinated a popular professional learning event known as Kindergarten Parade, bringing in veteran teachers to share their knowledge with younger teachers.



**Deborah “Debi” Braswell, Teacher, La Sierra Charter School, 29 years**

Debi Braswell faithfully served La Sierra Military Academy (LSMA) for 22 years as a social studies and English teacher. During her tenure, she taught both middle and high school English and middle school U.S. and world history. Her love of travel and literature inspired her instruction as she strived to make the content come alive for her students. Her passion and devotion to helping LSMA students achieve their own unique potential endeared her to both staff and students. Braswell was never satisfied with the status quo and strived to always be the best educator she could be, thus inspiring others to be better educators.

**Patricia “Patti” Butler, Instructional Assistant, AcCEL Program, 20 years**

Patti Butler's experience and dedication to the AcCEL Program was evident in her incredible work ethic. Over her many years with the program, Butler was able to adapt to any situation and classroom. She showed great understanding of behaviors and academic expectations, and demonstrated a desire to connect to the students she served. She was actively involved in the development of the program as it also served her son for many years. Every teacher and staff member she encountered loved her for her work ethic and willingness to be a team player. She was a positive influence on those around her and a great contribution to the AcCEL Program. The AcCEL staff wish Patti Butler the best during her well-deserved retirement.



**Georgia Carney, Instructional Assistant, AcCEL Program, 22 years**

Georgia Carney was an instructional assistant with the Tulare County Office of Education's Special Services Division since 1999. Over the years, she worked at several different sites with a passion for her work in each assignment. The students enjoyed her outgoing and fun personality. Carney was instrumental in making the Tulare AcCEL Community Based Instruction Harvest Dance and graduation ceremony a huge success.

**Andrea "Andi" Clark, Instructional Assistant, AcCEL Program, 42 years**

Andrea "Andi" Clark spent over 40 years as a paraprofessional in the AcCEL Program. She worked 33 of those 42 years enriching the hearts and lives of students with moderate to severe disabilities at Pixley Elementary School. Clark was a pillar at her school, always willing to go the extra mile. It was no surprise to find her participating in after school events, fundraising opportunities, and extracurricular activities all to benefit students and families. She has been an integral part of the AcCEL and Pixley Unified educational teams. Clark is also a proud grandmother of two beautiful granddaughters and will be enjoying her time with her retired husband and baking!



**Brenda Cox, Activities Specialist, SCICON, 14 years**

Brenda was hired as activity specialist for SCICON in 2007. During her 14 years in this position, she was vital in overseeing the nighttime activities for over 200 students per week. She was a mentor and a help to new interns each year. Cox worked to maintain SCICON traditions with attention to detail and adherence to standards. She was a devoted employee who loved the program and had a unique way of dealing with students that made each one feel special.



**Margie Cruz, Cook, Early Childhood Education Program, 21 years**

Margie Cruz began her career with Early Childhood Education (ECE) in 2001. She served children and families in several roles including substitute, teacher, and, most recently, as a cook at the Maple Child Development Center for the past seven years. As a cook, she served an important role of providing nutritional meals to over 200 people three times each day. The ECE staff appreciate Cruz for her many years of service to

the children and families of Tulare County.

**Mary Dolan, Administrator, New Teacher & Leadership Development Program, 4 years**

Mary Dolan served as the leader for the New Teacher and Leadership Development Program (NTLD) for four years. She supported the program in adhering to state Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) requirements. She helped to implement a special education grant, Local Solutions, to aid new special education teachers entering the teaching profession. Dolan supported many site and accreditation visits for programs across the state. She constantly worked on efficiency and implementation of technology-based components, and opportunities for program improvement. Prior to joining the TCOE team, Dolan worked at the Los Angeles County Office of Education in a similar role.



**Lillian Donate, Kitchen Supervisor, Early Childhood Education Program, 29 years**

Lillian Donate worked for Early Childhood Education, most recently as the kitchen manager for the London Child Development Center. Staff members reflected that she took pride in her work, always trying to make meals from scratch for the children. Donate recognized that a lot of children would come hungry to the center each morning, so she would make sure they had something appealing to eat so they could have a good day. Donate would often modify menus to ensure every child enjoyed their breakfasts and lunches. She was more than a cook, she was a great mentor/coach and a mother to all the children who attended at the center.

**Donna Glassman-Sommer, Executive Director, California Center on Teaching Careers, 31 years**

Donna Glassman-Sommer returned to TCOE in 2001 to serve as manager of the Recruitment Program. She was later promoted to director of the IMPACT Intern Program and the Recruitment Center, administrator for New Teacher & Leadership Development (NTLD), and executive director for the California Center on Teaching Careers. In more than 20 years, Glassman-Sommer attracted millions of dollars in state and federal aid for regional and state teacher preparation and recruitment efforts. Working with universities and alternative certification programs to streamline the process of becoming a teacher, she dedicated herself to solving California's long-running teacher



shortage. Glassman-Sommer was also a national trainer for CHARACTER COUNTS! and an adjunct instructor with Fresno Pacific University and College of the Sequoias.

**Kenneth Hamilton, Instructional Assistant, AcCEL Program, 5 years**

Ken Hamilton was an exceptional instructional assistant for the AcCEL Program. He worked in a variety of classrooms and was always appreciated by the teachers he supported. It was evident that Hamilton enjoyed working with AcCEL students and he had an easy, calm demeanor that made him an asset in any classroom. He was hard-working, dependable, and took on extra duties whenever he was asked. Staff members from the AcCEL Program miss him greatly, but wish him the best in his retirement.

**Dr. Olumuyiwa Idowu, Teacher, La Sierra Charter School, 2 years**

Dr. Idowu served as La Sierra Military Academy's (LSMA) math instructor for the past two years. During his tenure, Dr. Idowu taught four levels of high school math, provided after school and lunchtime tutoring, and served on the school site council. Dr. Idowu's kind and gentle spirit endeared him to both staff and students. His willingness to serve and help all students made a tremendous impact on La Sierra's culture and exemplified the school's vision of pursuing excellence with honor and courage. As one of LSMA staff member commented, "The world needs more gentle souls like Dr. Idowu."



**David Kennedy, Lead Maintenance Worker, SCICON, 29 years**

Dave Kennedy was a member of the SCICON family for nearly 30 years. As lead maintenance personnel, he ensured that the SCICON campus was maintained at the highest standards. Kennedy left his mark on SCICON by using his skills in carpentry to initiate and complete many projects that required high level woodworking skills. He always put the students first. His attention to safety details ensured that SCICON was at its highest level of readiness for visitors. Kennedy's many special projects can be seen around campus and add charm that will be appreciated for years to come.

**Darling Matamoros, Home Base Supervisor, Early Childhood Education Program, 29 years**

Darling Matamoros served in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program for 29 years, beginning as a family service worker. During her time in this position, she assisted families with a variety of applications and resources they needed. Her most recent position was that of Home Base supervisor. In this position, she assisted home educators in helping parents excel at being their child's first educators. The ECE staff



appreciates Matamoros for her many years of service to the families and children of Tulare County.

**Maria Mendez, Teacher Assistant, Early Childhood Education Program, 22 years**

For over 20 years, Maria Mendez served the children and families of Farmersville through the Snowden Child Development Center. Staff members remember her as a great team coworker who was eager to do her job as a teacher assistant. She was loving toward the children, respectful to parents and staff, and a joy to work with.



**Shameem Rayani, Center Supervisor, Early Childhood Education Program, 32 years**

Shameem Rayani began her career with Early Childhood Education (ECE) as a teacher assistant at the Woodville Child Development Center (CDC). From there, she was promoted to site supervisor at Doyle CDC and later the Granite Hills CDC in Porterville. Giving and kindhearted, she encouraged those around her to do their best in providing high quality services to children and families. During summers, she worked with the Migrant Education Program to provide services for migrant families. She regularly attended community events to recruit low-income families for the Head Start program, even speaking to families with small children she would see in the store about enrolling at one of ECE's centers.



**Emily Rivera, School Psychologist, Psychological Services, 29 years**

Emily Rivera had a 29-year career as a school psychologist. She was a champion for students and showed great compassion for their well-being and the well-being of their families. Rivera served in almost every small district in Tulare County, which included work with students with moderate to severe disabilities. She was unique in that she was both a credentialed school psychologist and a licensed clinical social worker. With her license, she supervised undergraduate and graduate level social work interns. Members of the school psychologist team remarked how kind and caring she was. She always carried a smile and was a great resource to the program.

**Jill Roderick, Instructional Assistant, AcCEL Program, 32 years**

Jill was a great team member, working well with others and creating lasting friendships with her coworkers over the years. Her relationship with the students was her strength, she had only their best interests at heart, and she gave 100% of her efforts to assist them with their academic goals. Her presence in the classroom is missed, but Roderick has continued subbing to fill in when instructional assistants are out. She is a great asset as she is familiar with classroom routines and students.



**John Rodriguez, Director, Human Resources, 13 years**

John became the personnel manager for TCOE's Early Childhood Education in August 2009. In 2012, when Jeanne Nava retired, Rodriguez became TCOE's Human Resources director. In his 10 years as director, he has overseen the merger of the ECE Human Resources Department with TCOE's. He's also overseen the increasing use of online job applications and records, and the transition to the new financial system. With care and integrity, Rodriguez helped craft work procedures during the pandemic, helping keep children and staff safe while complying with ever-changing state guidelines. Rodriguez was praised for his big heart for people.



**Judy Scruggs, Instructional Assistant, AcCEL Program, 29 years**

Judy Scruggs worked as an instructional assistant in the AcCEL Program for 29 years. She started her career working with students with intellectual and physical disabilities at L.B. Hill Learning Center in Porterville. For the last 15 years, she served in a Special Day Class at Terra Bella Elementary. "Miss S," as she was known by students, was an exceptional, loving, and kind person who always had a positive relationship with the students she served. She was much loved by the students, their parents, and staff.





**Joy Soares, Director, College & Career, 9 years**

Joy Soares retired in December 2021. She began her career at Educational Resource Services as a curriculum specialist focused on project based learning. She then became director of College and Career and director of the Tulare-Kings College and Career Collaborative (TKCCC). Soares was committed to supporting Tulare and Kings county districts in their efforts to provide a seamless continuum of academics, and career and technical education, with a connection to industry and postsecondary partners. Soares contributed to and served on regional, county, state, and national committees as a voice for college and career readiness for all students. Her enthusiasm, positivity, and energy will be missed by all at TCOE.



**Paresh Solanki, Budget & Operations Clerk, SEE & Co., 13 years**

Paresh came to TCOE in September 2008, working in the Services for Education and Employment program (SEE). Throughout his time as SEE's budgets and operations clerk, Solanki helped thousands of young adults get paid through the Youth@Work and Welfare to Work programs. Although he was not working directly with these youth, he relished being part of a program that helped struggling young adults launch into the world of work. He was careful not to miss one dollar when reviewing expenditures and payroll reports. In addition to the finances, Solanki also took care of TCOE's Akers campus, often going above and beyond by responding to late night calls from the Visalia Police Department when the alarm was triggered.



**Robin Souza, Instructional Assistant, AcCEL Program, 35 years**

Robin Souza worked as a special education instructional aide in Tulare since 1987. She served in many different classrooms, but most of her years were spent at Live Oak Middle School. Souza developed a strong rapport and connection, not only with students and their families, but with the county and district staff as well. It was commonplace for her to bring freshly baked bread and/or treats to share with everyone. Over the years, she always demonstrated a dedication and enjoyment for her job and for students.

**Tony Velásquez, Administrator, Migrant Education Program, 9 years**

Tony Velásquez joined the Migrant Education Program as director in 2012. He brought to the program a passion for providing the best opportunities to migratory families. Velásquez was well respected by families and students in both Tulare and Kings counties. He supported the efforts of his administrative team to offer supplemental services that opened a plethora of opportunities for migratory students. Velásquez was also an active committee member of the Feria Educativa/Education Fair organized by Univision and Fresno State, as well as the Farmworker Women's Conference led by former Tulare County Supervisor Lali Moheno. Through his active participation in these committees, he shared with migratory families the importance of being involved and supporting their children's education.



**Rolinda Williams, Teacher, Early Childhood Education Program, 20 years**

Rolinda Williams worked for Early Childhood Education for 20 years, including serving as a teacher in the toddler classroom at the Ivanhoe Child Development Center. Williams was an advocate for her children and maintained a great relationship with the parents in her classroom. She made a great impact on the families she served and is remembered for the love that she showed to children.



**Nicole Zweifel, Choreographer, Theatre Company, 20 years**

Nicole Zweifel was the choreographer for the TCOE Theatre Company. Over the years, she took on more responsibility, including leading a performance troupe, directing several shows, writing several original one-act pieces, and becoming the company's costume designer. Zweifel's energy, drive, and passion to work with the Theatre Company's younger performers in grades 1-5 was unmatched. She plans to remain active in local theater productions, working part-time as the costumer for the Theatre Company's summer musical.

**Jana Rice**, the student information systems specialist with Special Services, also retired this year. She served the program for 13 years.

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## Around the County

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### Nancy Bellin to speak at Tulare Historical Museum event

The Tulare Historical Museum is hosting an event titled *A History & Testimony of the Japanese American Internment* with a focus on the Tulare Assembly Center. The event is on Thursday, June 23 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the museum. TCOE's Nancy Bellin, a Japanese American, will be speaking at the event as part of a panel. When Bellin was a child living in Orosi, she and her family were sent to internment camps, including the one at the Tulare Fairgrounds called the "Tulare Assembly Center."



This event is being held in partnership with the cultural history class at Mission Oak High School, which will also present a brief history. In addition, there will be a question-and-answer session with the panel. The panel is made up of surviving Japanese American internees.

The Tulare Historical Museum is located at 444 W. Tulare Avenue in Tulare.

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Editor: [Robert Herman](#), Communications Director

Contributors: Nayirah Dosu, Marlene Moreno, Jennifer Fisher, and Ramon Garcia.

Contact Jennifer Fisher at [jenniferf@tcoe.org](mailto:jenniferf@tcoe.org) or (559) 733-6172.