



California Teacher Named 2024 National Special Education Teacher of the Year

Location: Riverside County Education Office, Riverside, CA

Arlington, VA, Jan. 26, 2024 — Theresa Copple, a special education teacher and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Itinerant Teacher for Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) in Riverside, California, has been named the 2024 Teacher of the Year by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The award recognizes excellence among teachers who provide direct services to children and youth with exceptionalities and who exemplify the best in supporting students with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.

CEC Executive Director Chad Rummel surprised Copple with the award Friday, alongside school and district officials and local and state CEC leaders.

“Theresa’s dedication to connecting people to services, to knowledge, and to each other exemplifies an outstanding teacher,” CEC’s President Kareem Thompson said. “It’s an honor to recognize her as someone who builds bridges with her students and community to help her students succeed.”

As a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Itinerant teacher who works for the Riverside County Office of Education, she serves RCOE students and students within the Alvord Unified School district. Many of her students rely heavily on technology to experience an equitable education.

As a teacher-without-a-room, aka itinerant teacher, one of her biggest challenges is not having a place to teach. She has taught at picnic tables outside, inside closets, borrowed principal offices, teachers’ lounge, and in the best place, the RSP room. She says collaborating with onsite RSP teachers is critical.

“My son’s kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Severson, taught, ‘Use your resources,’ and my Dad instructed with these words of wisdom: ‘Be like a sponge and soak it up,’” Copple said in her nomination letter. “I hear their mantras in my head as I teach, and I pass on their words. It’s connecting my teachers to my students through my instruction. It’s all about being a coordinator.”

As the 2024 CEC Teacher of the Year, Copple will receive a \$2,000 cash prize, a \$1,000 classroom grant, and travel and accommodations to attend the CEC annual convention in San Antonio, Texas, where she will be recognized in front of her peers. The CEC Teacher of the Year is selected by the CEC Honors Committee, and the award is sponsored by Let’s Go Learn, one of CEC’s premier sponsors.

“We are so happy to sponsor the CEC Teacher of the Year and to join the whole country in recognizing excellent educators like Theresa,” said Richard Capone, CEO of Let’s Go Learn. “We believe that teachers are the key to promoting success, so we are so pleased to be able to celebrate Theresa.”

About CEC

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable for individuals with disabilities.



Thanks to this year's sponsor, Lets GO Learn. Let's Go Learn provides highly diagnostic online assessments, automated progress monitoring, and gap-focused SDI to help teachers write IEPs faster and with greater accuracy, as well as support their students' academic achievements.

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If interested in broadcasting live, please contact Annie Drinkard at adrinkard@exceptionalchildren.org for more information and to coordinate.