

OSPI Announces Washington State Teacher of the Year and Classified School Employee of the Year

Blaire Penry is 2024 Washington State Teacher of the Year; Hilda Lail is 2023 Washington State Classified School Employee of the Year

OLYMPIA, WA, USA, October 1, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Blaire Penry, Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Electives Teacher at Auburn Online School, has been named 2024 Washington State Teacher of the Year, and Hilda Lail, Bilingual Family and Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator for Vancouver Public Schools, has been named 2023 Washington State Classified School Employee of the Year.



Both Penry and Lail will move forward to the national competition for their awards. Penry will compete for the National Teacher of the Year award. Lail will compete for the national Recognizing Inspirational School Employees (RISE) award, administered by the U.S. Department of Education. Both winners will be announced in Spring 2024.

"Each year, it's an honor to recognize and celebrate several of our incredibly talented and dedicated educators," said State Superintendent Chris Reykdal. "Blair and Hilda are excellent examples of some of the best parts of our public school system in Washington. They support and care for the individual needs of each and every one of their students, and they create learning spaces that are welcoming, engaging, and inclusive."

Blaire Penry, 2024 Washington State Teacher of the Year

Blaire Penry has supported K–12 students for 7 years, both as a teacher and as an education leader. In her current role at Auburn Online School, she teaches CTE courses and electives in leadership and the arts to students in grades 9–12.

"I believe that Mrs. Penry is an outstanding teacher," said Jekyla, one of Penry's students at Auburn Online School. "[T]he way that she shows her students how much she cares about them and the energy she brings to the classroom every day, constantly making you want to be there, is amazing."

Auburn Online School, which serves approximately 270 students in grades 1–12 in the Auburn School District, was established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As an inaugural faculty member at the school, Penry contributed to designing a curriculum that uses new and varied technology to engage students.

"Blair is especially skilled at building engaging, student-centered learning communities, providing consistent and caring guidance and elevating students' positive sense of self," said Nola Wilson, Principal of Auburn Online School. "In every learning experience she facilitates, her students drive and lead the learning."

Penry has also created and led professional development trainings for Auburn Online faculty teaching grades 1–12. As an active member of the Auburn Equity Leadership Academy, she promotes culturally responsive practices throughout the Auburn School District.

"Working with faculty has helped me deepen my own understanding of culturally responsive practices and incorporate techniques for staff to use immediately to make sure their classes are culturally welcoming and that students are affirmed in their cultural connections," Penry said. "The impact for our students is that they experience being in a learning environment that encourages curiosity, believes that mistakes are a necessary part of learning, and supports them on their path to success."

Hilda Lail, 2023 Washington State Classified School Employee of the Year

Hilda Lail has worked for Vancouver Public Schools (VPS) for more than 10 years, serving in a range of roles that support students who are multilingual and their families. Throughout her years of service, Lail has collaborated with families to reduce barriers for student academic success and increase family involvement in student learning.

"Being that I am a non-native English speaker, I sympathize with parents who have a hard time understanding terminology when navigating the school system," Lail said. "I talk to all families the way I wish someone had spoken to me as I became familiar with the language and country. In all that I do, my goal is for families to feel represented and that they are able to walk into schools with greater security and knowledge of the school system."

As part of her work, Lail coordinates The Plaza, a program that offers free English language classes for families. Approximately 180 people participate in the program, coming from countries including Mexico, Ukraine, Cambodia, Thailand, Russia, and Micronesia.

"It's beautiful to see how community is developed and sustained through these experiences," said Jeff Snell, Superintendent of Vancouver Public Schools, speaking about Lail's work with The Plaza. "The impact is felt through student enrichment and increased family confidence in our district as a trusted partner in the development of their children."

Lail also serves as writer, editor, interviewer, translator, and presenter for VPS en Español, a monthly televised program. Also available on the school district's social media platforms, the program provides information about the district to families that speak Spanish.

"Ms. Lail is passionate and highly skilled," said Janell Ephraim, Executive Director of Schools, Learning, and Equity for Vancouver Public Schools. "She believes that equity is at the core of effective schools. She exhibits this belief by using her skills and talents to support school communities by providing a bridge to access."

2024 Regional Teachers of the Year

- ESD 101: Madison Dissmore, Sixth Grade Math Teacher, Pullman Public Schools
- ESD 105: Shari Brink, High School Family & Consumer Sciences Teacher, Selah School District
- ESD 112: Donna Schatz, High School Science & CTE Teacher, Washougal School District
- ESD 113: Holly Johnson, Elementary Special Education Teacher, Tenino School District
- ESD 114: Shannon Lund, Fifth Grade Teacher, South Kitsap School District
- ESD 121: Blaire Penry, CTE & Electives Teacher, Auburn School District
- ESD 123: Eric Matson, High School CTE Teacher, Walla Walla Public Schools
- ESD 171: Sarah Burnell, Fourth Grade Teacher, Eastmont School District
- ESD 189: Maddie Huscher, Middle School Science Teacher, La Conner School District

2023 Regional Classified School Employees of the Year

- ESD 101: Carmen Roberts, Office Manager, Pullman Public Schools
- ESD 105: Chris Harris, Custodial Services, Selah School District
- ESD 112: Hilda Lail, Bilingual Family & Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator, Vancouver Public Schools
- ESD 114: Crystal Brown, Learning Support Services Coordinator, Sequim School District
- ESD 121: Anita Lee, Attendance Specialist, Tacoma Public Schools
- ESD 123: Nanette Duncan, Special Education Paraeducator, Richland School District
- ESD 171: Chris Rosales, Paraeducator, Wenatchee School District
- ESD 189: Brenda Flett, Paraeducator, Arlington Public Schools

For More Information

- [Watch the Educator Awards Ceremony](#)
- Washington's Teacher of the Year Program

- Washington's Classified School Employee of the Year Program

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