

BGCT recognizes some of Texas' BEST educators

October 31, 2023

Texas Baptists recognized nine public school educators as BEST—Baptist Educators Serving Texas.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas office of Cooperative Program ministry announced the BEST award recipients Oct. 26.

Texas Baptists established the annual BEST awards to honor teachers or administrators who lives out their faith in the service of students. Each recipient must be an alumnus of a BGCT educational institution, a member of a Texas Baptist church and serve in a Texas public school.

One winner from each of the nine universities that relate to Texas Baptists was selected.

The 2023 BEST award recipients are:

- Josias Hernandez, a graduate of the Baptist University of the Américas and high school Spanish teacher in La Grange Independent School District.
- Liz Hagins, a graduate of Baylor University and middle school instructional coach in Midway Independent School District.
- Lori Rapp, a graduate of Dallas Baptist University and superintendent in Lewisville Independent School District.
- Dori Ballard, a graduate of East Texas Baptist University and PK-2 tech educator and instructional technologist in New Boston Independent School District.
- Darby Isereau, a graduate of Houston Christian University and

elementary school teacher in Cleveland Independent School District.

- Judith Ozuna, a graduate of Howard Payne University and high school principal in Early Independent School District.
- Jimmy Pogue, a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University and high school English teacher and student council sponsor in Abilene Independent School District.
- Mark Fitzwater, a graduate of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and director of media services and Tiger media in Belton Independent School District.
- Sarah Silva Wallace, a graduate of Wayland Baptist University and elementary principal in Plainview Independent School District.

Bruce McCoy, director of the office of Cooperative Program ministry, praised the contributions of the educators chosen.

“Texas Baptists celebrate these graduates, who live out their Christian character daily in their classrooms and schools through the love and support they show to their students,” McCoy said.

As “salt and light” in the classroom, these educators are being the presence of Christ to many children who may never step foot inside a church, he added.

McCoy noted that of the more than 350,000 public school educators in Texas, approximately 6 percent to 8 percent are graduates from the nine universities that receive financial support through Texas Baptists’ Cooperative Program.

Since its inception in 1886, Christian higher education has remained a focus of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Today, about 800 new public educators are prepared for teaching and administration each year through Texas Baptists’ universities.

The BEST award, started in 2020, aims to recognize the substantial impact of Texas Baptists' universities on the public school system, celebrate educators and administrators who live out their faith as they serve students, and remind churches their Cooperative Program giving prepares tomorrow's educators.