



Press Release

Eight California High School Skilled Trades Teachers Among 50 Finalists for 2020 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence

\$1 Million in Cash Prizes to be Awarded in October

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Contact: Swati Pandey
c: 818-317-2131
spandey@hftforschools.org

CALABASAS, Calif.—Eight high school skilled trades teachers from California are among 50 teachers and teacher teams from across the country who were named today as finalists for the 2020 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence. The teachers and their trades programs are in the running for a share of \$1 million in total cash awards.

Chosen by an independent panel of judges from a field of more than 600 skilled trades teachers who applied for the prize, the finalists are:

- **Angela Arnett**, who teaches technical theater at Escondido High School in Escondido,
- **Benjamin Carpenter**, who teaches welding at John F. Kennedy High School in Richmond,
- **Nicholas Jordan**, who teaches construction at Montecito High School in Ramona,
- **Stephen Marsh**, who teaches advanced digital manufacturing at Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo High School in Long Beach,
- **Chris Mollkoy**, who teaches industrial arts at Dos Pueblos High School in Goleta,
- **Brent Tuttle**, who teaches welding at La Mirada High School in La Mirada,
- **Kathryn Worley**, who teaches industrial technology at West Hills High School in Santee and
- **Travis Wyrick**, who teaches agriculture at Visalia Technical Early College in Visalia.

The 50 finalists—some competing as individuals and some as teacher teams—hail from 23 states and specialize in trades including manufacturing, welding, construction, automotive, agriculture mechanics and technical theater. California is tied with New York for the most prize finalists of any state. (California also had the most finalists in 2017, 2018 and 2019.)

“Trades teachers are truly unsung heroes, and our prize seeks to show everyone how powerful these classes can be,” said Danny Corwin, executive director of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. “Skilled trades education has enormous potential to offer students pathways to multiple postsecondary opportunities, and these are the teachers who are providing them with the knowledge, skills and inspiration year after year.”

The full list of finalists is available [here](#) and short biographies of each California finalist are available below.

The 2020 finalists now advance to a second round of competition, where they will be asked to respond to online expert-led video learning modules designed to solicit their insights and creative ideas about teaching practices. The contenders will be asked how ideas from the modules might be used to inspire students to achieve excellence in the skilled trades. Two rounds of judging, each by separate independent panels of reviewers, will narrow the field to 18 winners and, finally, name three of those teachers Grand Prize recipients. All winners will be announced in late October.

The 18 winners will split \$1 million in prizes. Grand Prize winners will each receive \$100,000, with \$70,000 going to their public high school skilled trades program and \$30,000 to the individual skilled trades teacher or teacher team behind the winning program. The 15 additional winners will each be awarded \$50,000, with \$35,000 going to their public high school program and \$15,000 to the teacher or team. Finalists whose school, district and/or state policy prohibits receipt of the individual portion of prize earnings were eligible to apply on behalf of their school’s skilled trades program. If they win, their entire share of the prize will be awarded to the school.

The Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence was started in 2017 by Eric Smidt, the founder of national tool retailer Harbor Freight Tools. The prize recognizes outstanding instruction in the skilled trades in U.S. public high schools and the teachers who inspire students to learn a trade that prepares them for life after graduation. As recent [research](#) from JFF (formerly known as Jobs for the Future) and funded by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools found, students who “concentrate” (or take multiple trades courses as part of a program) are more likely to graduate than their

peers. Upon graduation, students are prepared for either further education or work in fields that routinely rank among the hardest jobs to fill.

Now, in the fourth year of the prize, more than 200 teachers have been recognized as winners or finalists. Winners join a nationwide network of outstanding trades teachers who convene regularly by webinar and in a three-day summer workshop to share best practices and advance their field.

“There’s a reason why polls show enormous support for trades education—with more than 8 in 10 parents and voters believing it deserves more funding,” Smidt said, citing a [poll](#) conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago and released this spring by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. “Trades teachers are building up the tradespeople of the future—the workers who will keep our critical care infrastructure, our communication networks, our homes and cars, up and running. They deserve to be celebrated.”

California Finalists

Angela Arnett began teaching at Escondido High School in 1998 as an English and dance teacher and took over the technical theater and stagecraft program in 2012. Though she already had earned a bachelor’s degree in English education and a master’s degree in dance, Arnett pursued further education via numerous conferences and professional development programs to grow her technical theater program. Her course attracts many students picking up tools for the first time and teaches skills that they can build on in the future, including through earning credits at Palomar College. Half of her stagecraft students are girls, and 65 percent of students are English learners, who she supports by translating her curriculum and coursework into Spanish. Over the past eight years, her program has built sets, installed lighting and provided other production skills to 21 theatrical productions.

Benjamin Carpenter is entering his third year teaching welding at Kennedy High School, a Title I school. For the past 20 years, Carpenter has been a professional fabricator, earning degrees in metalsmithing and design along with certifications in fire inspecting and fire safety. Before teaching at Richmond High School, he taught welding at the industrial arts school, The Crucible, for 12 years. Carpenter emphasizes the importance of collaboration and diversity in his classroom by dividing each class into groups of five students of different experience levels, backgrounds, academic expertise and personalities. These groups are responsible for the success of each of their members. He works with local community college welding program to connect to their curriculum and is building a pathway for students to gain college credits towards a

postsecondary certificate or degree. Carpenter is a certified emergency medical technician.

Nicholas Jordan is entering his seventh year of teaching construction at Montecito High, after a 23-year career as a journeyman carpenter and contractor. Hailing from a family of educators, Jordan has won several state and district teaching awards. At the most recent regional competitions hosted by SkillsUSA, a national nonprofit association of trades students, 14 of 14 Montecito construction students won medals. Jordan teaches his students not only practical skills like framing, roofing, plumbing and electrical, but also the importance of being dependable and having a good work ethic. Students support their high school by repairing siding on portable buildings, building a snack bar for the high school swim team and expanding the weight room for the football team. They also mentor elementary school children, working with them to construct benches, planter boxes and Adirondack chairs. Jordan was a finalist for the 2018 Prize for Teaching Excellence.

Stephen Marsh teaches advanced digital manufacturing at Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo High School in Long Beach. Next year will be his 30th as a teacher. After his service in the Marine Corps and a career in injection molding, fabrication and aerospace, Marsh discovered a love of teaching and bringing industry skills into the classroom. His students learn engineering, machining, welding, product innovation and energy and power technologies, and how they connect to other academic subjects and to advanced degrees at the local community college. He connects his students to real world opportunities through visits to and apprenticeships in local industries—from inside union shops to onboard aircraft carriers. His students also pursue their interest in the trades through afterschool activities, where students create solar boats, electric cars and robots. In the 2019-2020 academic year, Marsh began offering students dual enrollment with Long Beach Community College. Marsh was a finalist for the 2019 Prize for Teaching Excellence.

Chris Mollkoy teaches industrial arts at Dos Pueblos High School. Despite having learning challenges as a young student, Mollkoy was the first person in his family to graduate from college, earning a bachelor's degree in English and a teaching credential from the University of California, Davis. After teaching high school wrestling and English for seven years, Mollkoy switched careers, obtaining a contractor's license and starting his own finish carpentry company. He returned to teaching—this time as a trades teacher—and, in 2018, received the Marvin Melvin Award given to the Santa Barbara County Department of Education's career and technical education teacher of the year. Mollkoy has partnered with local organizations like Tradart, Partners in Education, the Santa Barbara Contractors Association, and Santa Barbara City College's Construction

Technology program to create pathways for his students. Mollkoy's students also support their community by designing and building hiking signs damaged in a recent wildfire and donating a tiny home to a local nonprofit to help victims of trafficking.

Brent Tuttle is a welding instructor at La Mirada High School and has taught for 19 years. Tuttle has developed a four-year welding program that includes more than 1,000 hours in the welding shop and the completion of all traditional academic classes by graduation. Students in Tuttle's welding pathway have a 98 percent graduation rate. Many of Tuttle's students are "nontraditional"—meaning that their gender is not well represented in the welding trade. Several of Tuttle's female students have won statewide SkillsUSA competitions, and one student earned second place in the country in SkillsUSA's welding sculpture contest. In 2016, Tuttle was selected as National SkillsUSA Alumni of the Year. Tuttle was a finalist for the 2019 Prize for Teaching Excellence.

Kathryn Worley teaches industrial technology at West Hills High School in Santee. A 31-year teaching veteran, Worley was a 2018 San Diego County Teacher of the Year and a finalist for California Teacher of the Year. Students in her program learn design principles and applications, then a variety of building and fabrication techniques, including computer numerical control (CNC) manufacturing, milling, laser and additive manufacturing, welding and robotics. With deep relationships to industry, Worley's students make connections to employers like Taylor Guitars, LifeProof, the carpenters union and drone manufacturers. Her students compete in "Shark Tank"-inspired design competitions, where they design, manufacture and market unique products to industry and community professionals. Worley was a finalist for the 2019 Prize for Teaching Excellence.

Travis Wyrick has 12 years of experience teaching agriculture, including for the past two years at Visalia Technical Early College, where he currently teaches agriculture. An alum of California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, Wyrick works to expose students to several in-demand trades like welding, concrete, woodworking, agriculture mechanics and irrigation installation. From introducing students to using hand tools and welders for the first time to having them build welding trailers and disc harrows, tools used to prepare fields for planting. Wyrick was a finalist for the 2018 Prize for Teaching Excellence while teaching at Ann Sobrato High School.

About Harbor Freight Tools for Schools

Harbor Freight Tools for Schools is a program of The Smidt Foundation, established by Harbor Freight Tools Founder Eric Smidt, to advance excellent skilled trades education in public high schools across America. With a deep respect for the dignity of these fields

and for the intelligence and creativity of people who work with their hands, Harbor Freight Tools for Schools aims to drive a greater understanding of and investment in skilled trades education, believing that access to quality skilled trades education gives high school students pathways to graduation, opportunity, good jobs and a workforce our country needs. Harbor Freight Tools is a major supporter of the Harbor Freight Tools for Schools program. For more information, visit us at HarborFreightToolsforSchools.org and [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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