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Arizona educator receives national honor for her family engagement efforts

National Center for Families Learning and Toyota award \$25,000 to two educators who best engage families in their classrooms

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (October 26, 2022) – Ivonne Ortiz of Mesa, Arizona, knows the power of positive thinking when it comes to achieving goals. She is a cheerleader for the students in her family literacy program, helping them to build confidence in themselves and to realize their educational and career goals. Her ability to work with students to turn their aspirations and dreams into action helped earn her the title of 2022 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year, a national designation that recognizes outstanding educators who are exceptional in engaging families in learning.

For 26 years, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) and Toyota have partnered to recognize educators across the nation who use a strong multi-generational approach to learning and focus on building effective family–school partnerships that support student achievement and school improvement. The award announcement was made public today during the Families Learning Conference by Michael Medalla, manager of Toyota USA Foundation + Workforce Readiness. Ortiz, and runner-up Dae Selcer of Columbia Heights, Minnesota, were surprised with news of their awards earlier this month. Watch the video of Ortiz’s surprise [here](#).

Ortiz, a family literacy instructor with Mesa Public Schools, strives to create a welcoming environment for her students where they feel safe to express their opinions and where their voices will be heard. She supplies parenting adults with many resources and tools to assist them in supporting their children’s academic success and achieving their own goals. She sees potential in all families and can envision the generational impact created by the work her students do today. As she puts it, “[With] the seeds I am planting, I know the harvest will be great.”

Prior to becoming an educator, Ortiz was an adult student in the district’s family literacy program. Drawing on her experience as a student helps Ortiz understand what families might be experiencing and the challenges or barriers they face in succeeding. Her story inspires students to believe that they, too, can achieve their goals.

“Toyota has partnered with NCFL to recognize outstanding educators for nearly three decades because we know family engagement has the power to transform families and communities for generations to come,” says Medalla. “Ivonne and Dae represent the best of the best in engaging multiple generations in learning together, and we are honored to recognize them with these awards.”

Selcer is a multilingual learner teacher and program coordinator at Prodeo Elementary Academy, Columbia Heights. Described by her colleagues as a “stalwart advocate for multilingual learners and their families,” Selcer is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive classroom that is co-designed

in partnership with families. She has also cultivated impactful relationships with community partners that directly support her school and families.

"Ivonne and Dae are educators committed to working alongside parents and children to create authentic learning pathways for their students," says Dr. Felicia C. Smith, NCFL's president and CEO. "By working with whole families and connecting their efforts to larger systems supporting adult learners and children, they are changing the course for how their communities advance equity outcomes and build toward a brighter future where families can thrive and contribute in meaningful ways."

Ortiz's school will receive \$20,000 to implement a family leadership program aimed at fostering authentic partnership among families and schools in her district. As runner-up, Selcer's school will receive a \$5,000 grant award to support her family engagement efforts. Since 1997, Toyota Family Teacher of the Year winners, runners-up, and their respective organizations have received \$650,000 and funded 52 innovative teacher-led projects.

The other finalists for this award were [previously announced](#) and include Renee Dawson (Atlanta, Georgia), Barbara Toure (Washington, DC) and Analía Wells (Greensboro, North Carolina).

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAMILIES LEARNING

NCFL is a national nonprofit that supports family success and well-being through education. We believe education is a shared responsibility and collaboration among families, schools, and community members that leads to powerful learning experiences. Partnering with educators, literacy advocates, and communities, NCFL has worked for over 30 years to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. NCFL's vision is to establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities by 2030, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create more equitable communities. When parenting adults and children are engaged in learning together, the whole family benefits, contributing to a thriving, equitable community. For more information on NCFL, visit familieslearning.org. To express your interest in partnering with us on our 60x30 Vision, email info@familieslearning.org.

ABOUT TOYOTA

Toyota (NYSE:TM) has been a part of the cultural fabric in North America for more than 60 years, and is committed to advancing sustainable, next-generation mobility through our Toyota and Lexus brands, plus our more than 1,800 dealerships.

Toyota directly employs more than 48,000 people in North America who have contributed to the design, engineering, and assembly of nearly 43 million cars and trucks at our 13 manufacturing plants. By 2025, Toyota's 14th plant in North Carolina will begin to manufacture automotive batteries for electrified vehicles. With more electrified vehicles on the road than any other automaker, more than a quarter of the company's 2021 North American sales were electrified.