

California Department of Education (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr08/yr08rel165.asp>)  
Page Generated: 11/20/2008 1:27:26 PM



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
**NEWS RELEASE**

**JACK O'CONNELL**  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

Release: #08-165  
November 19, 2008

Contact: Pam Slater  
E-mail: [communications@cde.ca.gov](mailto:communications@cde.ca.gov)  
Phone: 916-319-0818

**State Superintendent Jack O'Connell Announces  
California's Nominee for National Teacher of the Year**

SACRAMENTO — State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell announced today that he has selected Alex Kajitani, a newly named California Teacher of the Year and middle school math teacher in Escondido (San Diego County), as the state's nominee for the prestigious National Teacher of the Year competition.

Kajitani is known nationwide as The Rappin' Mathematician, who uses music to make math, as well as the world, more relevant to his students.

"I am exceptionally pleased that Alex Kajitani is representing California at the national level. I greatly admire his passion for teaching, his creative approach to motivating middle-grade students, and his success in making math come alive and relevant," O'Connell said. "He is a very articulate and engaging individual who is totally committed to reaching every child."

Kajitani was chosen last week as one of five California Teachers of the Year, one of which is selected as the state's candidate for the National Teacher of the Year Program. In addition to Kajitani, the four other outstanding California Teachers of the Year 2009 are: Alastair Inman, a science teacher at Lexington Junior High School in the Anaheim Union High School District (Orange County); Jose L. Navarro IV, a social studies and U.S. history teacher at Sylmar Senior High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Los Angeles County); Mark Teeters, choral music director at Vintage High School in the Napa Valley Unified School District (Napa County); and Loredana Wicketts, a third grade teacher at Eisenhower Elementary in the Corona-Norco Unified School District (Riverside County).

The National Teacher of the Year winner will be selected in the spring of 2009 by a panel convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers. All candidates in the program will be honored at a White House ceremony.

In his application for the California Teachers of the Year Program, he wrote:

"No subject, especially the mathematics that I teach, can be truly learned if the students do not see the relevance of the information in their everyday lives. I am constantly looking for ways to 'meet them where they live.' On any given day, I am weaving lessons about the math the students are learning with issues important to them, such as advertising, the Internet, and popular music. Never will a student leave my class thinking that they will not use the information we have discussed."

Kajitani earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1995, and a Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction from San Diego State University in 2004.

He can be reached at Mission Middle School, 939 East Mission Ave. Escondido, CA 92026, San Diego County, 760-432-2452, or by e-mail at [akajitani@yahoo.com](mailto:akajitani@yahoo.com).

For more information about the National Teacher of the Year Program, please visit: [National Teacher of the Year Program](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/National_Teacher_of_the_Year/) [[http://www.ccsso.org/projects/National\\_Teacher\\_of\\_the\\_Year/](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/National_Teacher_of_the_Year/)] (Outside Source). See also, [California Teachers of the Year for 2009 - Year 2008](#).

###

---

**Jack O'Connell** — State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Communications Division, Room 5206, 916-319-0818, Fax 916-319-0100