ISD 917 Core Values Awards

School Board Recognition – November 10, 2026

This year, ISD 917 is excited to recognize staff members who exemplify our district's nine core values through their dedication to students, colleagues, and our school communities. These individuals were nominated by their peers for the meaningful impact they make each day. We are proud to celebrate eight outstanding employees receiving nine Core Values Awards!

Bridge Builder Award – Collaboration

Allison "Ali" Inserra

Ali is being recognized for her exceptional collaboration and dedication to meeting the needs of her students. When she learned that students in her classroom had Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI), a condition she was previously unfamiliar with, she took the initiative to learn everything she could. She then transformed her classroom environment and adapted lessons and materials to better support her students' visual needs. Her willingness to ask questions, learn from others, and put that learning into action has made her a role model for collaborative teaching.

Nominated by: Amy Kaufman
Supervisor: Jennifer Hetland (DASH)

Difference Maker Award – Personalization

Jennifer "Jen" Kendall

Jen is being recognized for her remarkable ability to personalize learning and create meaningful opportunities for every student. She develops customized games, adapted activities, and accessible materials that allow students with diverse needs to actively participate in classroom learning. She also takes initiative in coordinating complex equipment schedules and supporting student independence through thoughtful prompting and encouragement. Her creativity, patience, and ability to anticipate needs make her an invaluable member of her team.

Nominated by: Leah Harris
Supervisor: Stephanie Betley (TESA)

Heart of 917 Award – Empathy

Janet Bruce

Janet is being recognized for the compassion, patience, and genuine care she brings to her work with students in the TESA program. As a job coach at the TESA Café, she goes above and beyond to help students build confidence and independence. One particularly meaningful example is her dedication to teaching a student delivery routes throughout the DCTC campus, patiently practicing until the student could successfully complete deliveries independently. Janet's kindness and unwavering belief in her students truly represent the Heart of 917.

Nominated by: Jenny Lentz
Supervisor: Stephanie Betley (TESA)

Trailblazer Award – Innovation

Lauren Steuder

Lauren is being recognized for her creativity and initiative in developing innovative resources that benefit students and staff at BTC. She has created organized systems to help staff track individual student goals, developed a shared collection of accessible math resources, and designed instructional slides and activities to support classroom learning. Rather than waiting to be asked, Lauren identifies needs and develops practical solutions that make learning more engaging and her colleagues' work more effective.

Nominated by: Brenda Szoka
Supervisor: Stephanie Betley (TESA)

Connection Creator Award – Communication

Sofie Fitzsimmons

Sofie is being recognized for her dedication to helping students find their voices, communicate their needs, and advocate for themselves. Through individualized communication support, Sofie helps students build meaningful relationships, develop independence, and participate more fully in their learning environments. Her collaboration with staff and families ensures that communication strategies extend beyond speech sessions and become part of students' everyday experiences. Sofie's work empowers students to recognize that their voices matter.

Nominated by: Rira Bullecer
Supervisor: AJ Boehmer (Speech)/Amy Swaney (CEC-SUN)

Equity Advocate Award – Equity

Shannon Wendel

Shannon is being recognized for her dedication to removing barriers and creating meaningful learning opportunities for every student. She continually adapts tasks and develops creative projects that allow students to actively participate, build skills, and experience success. Through

activities such as the student-run craft cart, Shannon ensures students are doing the work themselves, building independence and confidence along the way. Her calm leadership, creativity, and willingness to mentor colleagues help create an environment where everyone feels valued and capable.

Nominated by: Jenny Lentz
Supervisor: Stephanie Betley (TESA)

Compass Award – Integrity

Jodeci Medina

Jodeci is being recognized for her dependability, leadership, and unwavering commitment to doing what is right for students and colleagues. She consistently steps forward to support others, both within her classroom and across the program. When working with students who demonstrate challenging behaviors, Jodeci approaches each situation with patience, resilience, and compassion. Her willingness to take initiative while remaining open to learning from others, along with her respectful and supportive relationships, makes her a trusted and valued member of the ISD 917 team.

Nominated by: Zylyll Occena
Supervisor: Amy Swaney (CEC -SUN)

Inclusion Champion Award – Diversity

Casandra "CJ" Wood

CJ is being recognized for her ability to create a welcoming environment where colleagues feel valued, respected, and included. Her nomination highlights the meaningful impact she had on a new staff member, helping that colleague feel comfortable, supported, and confident in bringing their unique perspective to the workplace. CJ builds relationships grounded in trust, openness, and genuine care, creating a sense of belonging that extends throughout her team.

Nominated by: Vena Jones
Supervisor: Stephanie Betley (TESA)

Steward of Excellence Award – Stewardship

Casandra "CJ" Wood

CJ is also being recognized for her exceptional stewardship and commitment to supporting students, colleagues, and the broader ISD 917 community. She consistently takes initiative, embraces new responsibilities, and invests her time and talents in helping others succeed. As a leader and a knowledgeable practitioner of the Nurtured Heart Approach, CJ helps students recognize their strengths while modeling professionalism, compassion, and high expectations.

Her thoughtful communication, strong relationships, and dedication to continuous improvement demonstrate how everyday actions can create a lasting impact.

Nominated by: Ashley Hansen
Supervisor: Stephanie Betley (TESA)

Special Recognition: CJ's selection for two Core Values Awards is especially meaningful, reflecting the many ways her colleagues recognize and appreciate her contributions to ISD 917.

Closing Recognition

Congratulations to all eight of our award recipients! These individuals represent the very best of ISD 917. Through their creativity, compassion, collaboration, and commitment to students, they demonstrate that our core values are more than words. They are reflected in the meaningful work our staff do every day.

We are incredibly grateful for their contributions and proud to recognize them before the School Board and our district community.