San Diego County Taxpayers Association Announces First Golden Watchdog and Golden Fleece Winners in the Education Award Category

SDCTA’s Awards Committee recognizes the Cajon Valley Union School District for their coordinated Rapid Reopening efforts, and criticizes Sweetwater Union High School District for misuse of COVID-19 relief funds

San Diego (April 19, 2022) - The San Diego County Taxpayers Association (SDCTA) announced the first finalists and winners celebrated at the Annual Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards! In the Education awards category, SDCTA will award the coveted Golden Watchdog to the Cajon Valley Union School District for their Rapid Reopening process in light of prolonged COVID-19 school closures throughout the county. The Golden Fleece will be awarded to Sweetwater Union High School District for their misuse of federal COVID-19 relief funds.

Now in its 26th year, the Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards, nicknamed “the Goldens” will convene community and business leaders, elected officials, and more in downtown San Diego to applaud good governance that took place through 2020/2021, as well as poke fun at the bad. The nominated policies and programs were submitted to the SDCTA through a public process. The confidential Goldens’ Award Committee carefully deliberated each nominee to determine which should earn a Fleece or Watchdog award in the following four categories: Education; Transportation, Energy, Water and Infrastructure; Public Health and Safety, and Public-Private Partnership. The following nominees were finalists and winners in the Education category:

- **Winner - Watchdog: Cajon Valley Union School District: Rapid Reopening**
  While the San Diego County school system was indefinitely closed with no plans to bring children back to school, Cajon Valley Union School District took a brave step to safely reopen its doors to students. The school closures sent families reeling, leaving parents with no care for their children, and students facing a learning slide our country has never experienced. Rather than coming from a place of “no”, we applaud the Cajon Valley Union School District for embracing creative problem solving to ensure children receive the education they deserve in a safe environment. Bravo CVUSD!

- **Finalist - Watchdog: Multiple School Districts “Broadband Vans” Program**
  It all started when news spread of a student logging on to virtual class from a Taco Bell parking lot because there was no internet at home. Schools throughout San Diego County put their heads - and vehicles - together to provide mobile broadband hotspots for students throughout the region. This innovative program allowed students to login to class, complete homework, and stay connected, at a time when isolation was a formidable opponent.

- **Finalist - Watchdog: County Office of Education: 1 to 1 Device Procurement Program**
  When schools shuttered their doors to students in the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the County Office of Education worked swiftly and efficiently to round up devices and distribute
them to schools and districts in the region. Because of this quick thinking, every student in the County was provided their own device to use to login to classes and continue their studies.

- **Winner - Fleece: Sweetwater Union High School District: Misuse of CARES Act Funding for Teacher Rises**
  Sweetwater should really know better by now. Using pandemic relief dollars to fund teacher raises is a big “no no” and is making us raise our eyebrows in shock! When the economy is crashing down around us, hospitals are nearing capacity, and students are struggling to connect with their teachers at all - we are curious as to how this seemed like a responsible use of public funds. Well it wouldn’t be a Goldens without Sweetwater making the Fleece list, would it?

- **Finalist - Fleece: San Diego Unified School District: Not Following CDC Guidance**
  While San Diego Unified School District made some good decisions and did their best to shift to distance learning early on, the slow reopening of in-person classes exacerbated the learning slide that has gravely impacted a generation of students. We are all for exercising caution, but when the CDC advises 3 feet of distancing, and San Diego Unified says 6 feet, we can’t help but scratch our heads wondering why…

“Given the turmoil with COVID-19 policies changing, and the impact school closures had on families, students, and our economy, we are pleased that the award nominations reflected this and highlighted the importance of consistent, good policies that are important to taxpayers,” said Adriana Mendoza, the Goldens’ Event Chair and SDCTA Board Member.

The 26th Annual Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards is taking place on Thursday, April 28 at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are still available. Visit [www.sdcta.org/goldens](http://www.sdcta.org/goldens) to learn more. The next finalists and winners will be announced on Thursday, April 21 in the Public Health and Safety category.