



For Immediate Release

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Esperero Canyon Middle School Teacher Julie Rombach Named 2026 Arizona Middle Grades Teacher of the Year

TUCSON, AZ (July 31, 2026) — The Arizona Association for Middle Level Education is proud to announce Julie Rombach, 8th Grade Social Studies Teacher at Esperero Canyon Middle School in the Catalina Foothills School District, as the 2026 Arizona Middle Grades Teacher of the Year. The award recognizes exceptional educators who exemplify excellence in teaching young adolescents through rigorous instruction, meaningful relationships, and an unwavering commitment to student success.

Rombach was selected for her exceptional ability to combine challenging, student-centered instruction with the caring relationships that define outstanding middle-level education. Colleagues, students, and school leaders describe her as an educator who inspires curiosity, empowers student voice, and helps young adolescents discover the relevance of history in shaping their own futures.

Rather than asking students to simply memorize historical facts, Rombach creates authentic learning experiences that cultivate critical thinking, civic responsibility, and thoughtful discussion. Through inquiry-based instruction, historical simulations, structured academic discourse, and evidence-based writing, students explore complex historical topics while learning to analyze multiple perspectives and defend their thinking with confidence.

One of the hallmarks of her teaching is the annual Civic Action Fair, where every eighth-grade student researches a meaningful community issue, develops evidence-based solutions, and presents recommendations to authentic audiences. The project reflects Rombach's belief that

education should prepare students not only for academic success, but also for active, informed citizenship.

Equally impressive is the classroom culture she has built. Students consistently describe an environment where they feel respected, challenged, and supported. Her principal, Stacey Gist, noted that Rombach "doesn't just teach history, she empowers the kids who will make it," creating a classroom where historical empathy, critical literacy, and civic agency come alive.

Colleagues also praise Rombach for her collaborative leadership and commitment to ensuring every student has access to rigorous learning. She partners closely with special education staff, families, and fellow teachers to provide meaningful support while maintaining high expectations for all learners.

"Julie represents everything exceptional middle grades teaching should be," said Dr. Robert Caplinger, President of the Arizona Association for Middle Level Education. "She creates a classroom where students are challenged to think critically, encouraged to find their voice, and inspired to become engaged citizens. Her passion, professionalism, and unwavering belief in young adolescents make her richly deserving of this recognition."

Rombach will be honored during the 2026 Arizona Middle Grades Summit at Arizona State University on Saturday, September 19, where educators from across Arizona will gather to celebrate excellence in middle-level education.

The Arizona Middle Grades Teacher of the Year Award is proudly sponsored by Mountain America Credit Union, which generously supports and celebrates exceptional educators who make a lasting difference in the lives of Arizona's young adolescents.

About the Arizona Association for Middle Level Education

The Arizona Association for Middle Level Education is Arizona's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the education of young adolescents. Through professional learning, advocacy, leadership development, and statewide partnerships, AzAMLE supports educators in creating responsive, challenging, empowering, equitable, and engaging learning environments for every middle grades student.

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