



TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD



ERIKA RUIZ SANTILLÁN

*Grade 3 Bilingual Teacher
Adelante Charter School of Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara Unified School District*

Erika Ruiz Santillán is the **CABE 2026 Teacher of the Year**, honored for her excellence in bilingual education and her deep commitment to multilingual learners. Erika is a third-grade teacher at **Adelante Charter School of Santa Barbara** in the **Santa Barbara Unified School District**. Born in Santa Barbara to immigrant parents from Mexico and a former English learner herself, she brings lived experience, empathy, and cultural insight to her teaching practice. Her educational journey—from Santa Barbara schools to Santa Barbara City College, study abroad in Granada, Spain, and degrees from the University of California, Santa Barbara—reflects her dedication to language, culture, and learning. She earned her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential with BCLAD authorization from the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education.

Erika's passion for teaching began through her leadership in Mexican folklórico dance, where she instructed and directed youth performers, cultivating confidence, discipline, and pride in cultural heritage. In the classroom, her philosophy centers on affirming students' linguistic and cultural identities, fostering bilingualism as an asset, maintaining high expectations through data-driven instruction, and partnering with families and communities. Erika Ruiz Santillán exemplifies the heart, skill, and vision of an outstanding bilingual educator, making her a truly deserving recipient of the **CABE 2026 Teacher of the Year Award**.

CABE congratulates Erika Ruiz Santillán on receiving the CABE 2026 Teacher of the Year Award!