

# Lewis Chappellear

## Biography

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In May 1982, the Clash had a hit song “Should I Stay or Should I Go.” For Lewis Chappellear, the 2008 Teacher of the Year for the State of California and one of the three-runner-ups for the 2008 National Teacher of the Year, there was a time – early in his career – when that song represented a struggle that he and every good teacher experiences.

Chappellear is a former engineer with two graduate degrees; a Bachelor of Science degree in biomedical engineering from Boston University in 1994, and a Master of Science degree in mechanical engineering from Columbia University in 1995. After working as an engineer, and then, as the owner of a restaurant in Toronto, Lewis moved to California, where he decided to become a teacher. He earned a California Clear Teaching Credential in math, physics and electronics in 2001. He received a National Board Certification in 2005 and thought that he was at “the top of my game.”

He spent countless hours outside the classroom, working with his students, giving professional development seminars and presentations, recruiting students and teachers from other schools to start robotics teams and programs, and began thinking endlessly about what else he could do. Socratic seminars, articulation, 2+2+2 programs, cooperative learning, thematic units, interdisciplinary projects, learning walks, smaller learning communities became his mantra, as he successfully incorporated all these “bells and whistles” into his program.



**Lewis Chappellear**  
M.S. in Engineering  
2008 California Teacher of the Year

Lewis also witnessed Engineering and Robotics programs all over the country reach a peak of ultimate success, and then fall into obliteration because of teacher burnout and unrealistic sustainability. He insisted, “This was not going to be me.” In spite of this declaration, he knew that he had come to a critical point in his career.

“Should I stay in the classroom or should I go?” he wondered.

On the last day of school, a student, Gus, quietly approached him and changed his point of view. Gus had always been the quiet kid who never really said much and hid in the classroom’s sea of faces. “He thanked me for saving his life that year. He said that the only reason he came to school was to come to my class. It was a place where he could actually be himself, he said, a place where he could feel safe and escape his problems. He reminded me that I really did make a difference in my students’ lives. And that’s when I decided to stay.”



Lewis Chappellear is an instructor in the School of Engineering and Design at Monroe High School, an urban, year-round, ninth-to-twelfth grade comprehensive high school with wall-to-wall small learning communities for approximately 3,400 students. Forty-six percent of the school’s students are English Language Learners, and 82% qualify for free or reduced-fee lunches. The Engineering and Design classes that he teaches are Robotics, CAD (Computer Aided Design), and Project Physics. Lewis also teaches an after-school tutoring program, coaches the Robotics team, is the Impact Coordinator, and holds an active seat on the advisory council of the Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley. The technology that his students have access to in his classroom is current, and represents what is found in today’s engineering companies. Upon completion of his program, the students have an understanding of the different types of engineering and technology careers available, and several have already been accepted into university engineering programs.

He is also the champion for the nation’s first regional industry-specific business-education partnership, the San Fernando Valley Aviation-Aerospace

Collaborative (SFVAAC), and the Engineering and Manufacturing Committee (E=MC2). Both support the School of Engineering and Design at Monroe High School by providing mentorships, internships, student-educator tours, classroom speakers, programs and curriculum advisement for more than 350 students. Each of these business-education partnerships has been in existence less than one year, and are already considered the business-education partnership models for the City of Los Angeles and the State of California; and just perhaps, the

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School of Engineering & Design,  
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Members of the SFVAAC and E=MC2 include KETIV Technologies; Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne; Northrop Grumman Corp., Anheuser Busch, Inc., Medtronic Minimed, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and a number of prominent aviation-aerospace and civil engineering firms

throughout the State of California.

Lewis Chappellear says that being “Teacher of the Year” is a big pair of shoes to fill. “Throughout my life, all I have tried to do is what’s right. The walls of my classroom have expanded and now reach into neighborhoods throughout our country, and far beyond. My journey as a teacher has taught me that a forest is created one tree at a time. The integrity and strength of that forest is only as strong as the weakest tree. I am honored to be ‘Teacher of Year,’ and yes, it appears that the shoes fit. And on behalf of engineers everywhere, I am honored to wear them.”