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KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

2017 Alaska Teacher of the Year plus the Alternate Teacher of the Year are #KPBSD educators!

Soldotna, December 6, 2016—What happens when the Alaska Commissioner of Education, Dr. Michael Johnson, arrives at Soldotna High School? He announces to a crowded assembly of students that teacher James Harris is the 2017 Alaska Teacher of the Year! And, the 2017 Alternate Teacher of the Year is Stephanie Cronin, from KPBSD Seward High School!

“James Harris believes that the fundamental purpose of teaching literature is to connect students with the world,” Commissioner Johnson said in a statement. “That’s a very good definition of teaching in general. To his classroom, Mr. Harris brings his knowledge, passion, practical experience in writing, and empathy for students. He is an inspiring choice for Alaska Teacher of the Year.”



James Harris, Soldotna High School, 2017 Alaska Teacher of the Year

KPBSD: ONE DISTRICT, FORTY-FOUR DIVERSE SCHOOLS

The mission of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District is to develop productive, responsible citizens who are prepared to be successful in a dynamic world.

ANCHOR POINT COOPER LANDING HOMER HOPE KACHEMAK SELO KENAI MOOSE PASS NANWALEK NIKISKI NIKOLAEVSK NINILCHIK PORT GRAHAM RAZDOLNA SELDOVIA SEWARD SOLDOTNA STERLING TUSTUMENA TYONEK VOZNESENKA



“Yes, yes, yes!” will be the response Mr. Harris offers in 2017 when he is called upon to speak at education conferences and participate in various statewide education working groups. He will be a member of Commissioner Johnson’s teacher advisory group. The Alaska Teacher of the Year is the state’s nominee for national Teacher of the Year. [Watch the James Harris learns he is 2017 Alaska Teacher of the Year video!](#)

A 12-year professional, James Harris has taught English at Soldotna High School for seven years. A published writer, editor, and college educator, he chairs the English department and professional development at his school, and coaches youth hockey. Harris says, “Through literature I hope to help my students empathize with the human story, open themselves up to the joys, sufferings, motivations, disappointments, and triumphs of others,

and thus achieve a kinder and more complex understanding of themselves.”

Once students graduate, they start the stories of their own lives. Harris said he uses every skill, experience, talent, and tool at his command to give his students what they need to face their life choices armed with literacy, empathy, and a deeper sense of what they can contribute to our human community.

Mr. Harris holds a bachelor of arts degree in English from Western State College of Colorado, a master of fine arts degree in creative writing from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and a master of arts degree in teaching from the University of Alaska Southeast.

“James is an outstanding educator who always puts kids first. He makes a lasting impression on all the students he comes into contact with, whether in the classroom or in the hallway. He inspires hope, ignites imagination, and instills a love of learning. He is very deserving of this honor and it is a pleasure to work with him each and every day.” – Tony Graham, Soldotna High School principal

KPBSD Superintendent Sean Dusek said, “This is the State Championship of teaching! We are excited and humbled to have two of our teachers recognized as the best in our state! Congratulations to Mrs. Cronin for being the alternate this year. She is and always has been an outstanding teacher. As for our new 2017 Alaska Teacher of the year, Mr. Harris, I am very pleased his great effort with our students has been recognized at the state level. He is an excellent representative of the teachers in our district! It is truly a great day in our district as both of these outstanding individuals have earned the highest honors in our state.”

Stephanie Cronin, Seward High School 2017 Alternate Alaska Teacher of the Year



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Ms. Cronin will serve as Alaska Teacher of the Year if Mr. Harris is named national Teacher of the Year. She has been teaching mathematics and engineering at Seward High School for 17 of her 19 years in the profession. A leader in our district and the community, she serves on committees for effective instruction, teacher evaluation, professional development, assessment, curriculum, and educational technology, the school site council, and the local Native Youth Olympics.

“The staff and students of Seward High, and entire community, could not be more proud of Ms. Cronin and her amazing accomplishment,” said Trevan Walker, Seward High School principal. “It’s gratifying to know that she is recognized, at the state level, for that which we have always known in Seward ... that her Positive Math Attitude (PMA) has resulted in years of Seward High graduates who share her passion.”



Reached by telephone, Cronin said, “I am humbled and honored to be selected as the 2017 Alaska Alternate Teacher of the Year. I’m proud to represent the amazing teachers of the State of Alaska.”

Cronin says her greatest contribution to education is her impact on students, which is based on respectful, close relationships. Her passion is to show students the beauty and possibilities of mathematics. One student wrote that Ms. Cronin planted the seed that it’s okay to be excited about mathematics. “She

increased my positive math attitude exponentially,” the student said, mathematically. She is a leader in Seward High School’s technology-heavy hybrid model, which offers students many ways to earn credits, videotaped lectures to make the most of class time, and online parallels to courses so students have some control over where and when they learn.

Ms. Cronin holds a bachelor of science degree in economics from the University of Minnesota. She holds three degrees from the University of Alaska Anchorage: a bachelor of science degree in mathematics, a master of arts degree in teaching, and a master of arts degree in educational leadership.

Links

Video: [Commissioner Johnson surprises James Harris to announce 2017 Alaska Teacher of the Year!](#)

Webpage: [Alaska Teacher of the Year](#)

October 22, 2016 [Commissioner Johnson Announces Finalists for Teacher of the Year](#)

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