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**KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**

## NEWS RELEASE

### ***Seward graduate is now KPBSD educator: Carlyn Nichols, Seward High School, Class of 1997***

**Carlyn (Walker) Nichols, a Science, Culinary, and Maker educator at Seward Middle School, a 2018 Kenai BP Teacher of Excellence, and 1997 Seward High graduate said, “I believe our young people need to struggle together to solve problems, explore new ideas, create content, and engage with their communities locally as well as beyond. If we limit their experiences and their chance to wrestle with ideas, problems and questions, we are limiting their ability to succeed in a future that will demand innovation and collaboration.”**

One parent wrote, “My son had never shown a keen interest in science until he entered her classroom. Now, he can’t wait to get to her class so he can be immersed in her lessons and strike off on new adventures of discovery. When you ask your child how their day went and he replies ‘It was awesome since I had Mrs. Nichols today,’ you know that teacher is something special.”

Mrs. Nichols explains, “As funding for education has dwindled, so has the opportunity for students to explore art, music, shop and other vocational skills. Our students work hard all day with the core subjects and have little chance to work with their hands or express themselves creatively. Screens dominate our society and students seem less independent every year.

In order to combat these trends and increase student access to vocational skills I created a Maker Lab and foods class at Seward Middle School. Now students can be makers, creators, computer scientists, cooks, and artists. These students have built furniture for their rooms, made their own longboards, lamps and blankets, coded their first robot, created their first video game, taken apart engines, learned to solder, or were content to create art or small projects that held their pencils or money. Giving students a place to play, tinker, and make has brought me an incredible sense of joy and accomplishment. They are learning to experiment, work independently, try and fail, and repeat.”

#### **Educating into the 2020s...**

“This is a very exciting and challenging time to be an educator amidst the possibilities and trappings of technology. Students now have more opportunities to access information, collaborate, create, and curate than ever before. Access to technology enables us to challenge and inspire students to innovate and involve themselves in new and exciting ways. We can deliver content in a much more relevant, fluid,

**KPBSD: ONE DISTRICT, FORTY-FOUR DIVERSE SCHOOLS**

**The mission of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District is to empower all learners to positively shape their futures.**

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**1 OF 3**

diverse, and personal way using technology. However, our students are already very *plugged in* and can easily become passive and apathetic learners in a high tech environment. It is up to us to leverage technology in a way that improves their experience and ability to engage with the content. Our curriculum should drive them to problem solve, innovate, participate, and safely step beyond their comfort zone. Technology should make education more meaningful, individual and creative, not passive or disconnected.

At the same time, we as educators and parents need to find every opportunity for young people to manipulate, play, and explore their physical-natural world. Students are more and more disconnected from the physical and natural world; it is up to us to mindfully act to mend that. It is crucial we give them the chance to physically construct, design, experiment, and observe their world. We must mindfully act to mend the disconnect between our students and their physical or natural world.

**KPBSD INSPIRATION:** *Carlyn Nichols*  
 CLASS OF 1997, SEWARD HIGH SCHOOL  
 TODAY: SCIENCE, CULINARY, AND MAKER EDUCATOR AT SEWARD MIDDLE SCHOOL

I am incredibly proud to build and teach a culinary arts class at Seward Middle School. Through this class, my students have fed needy families, catered board meetings and treated their families to home cooked meals. Together we explore nutrition, meal planning, and new foods. Foods class is vital because they gain one more skill toward an independent life and knowledge of healthy eating, not to mention the essential skills of washing dishes, doing laundry, and cleaning a kitchen. It is courses like Maker Lab and Foods Class where I feel like I make the most difference as a teacher; it is where I see students light up, feel the greatest sense of accomplishment and pride. Everyone can succeed in Maker Lab and Foods class; in these safe spaces, all students are equal.”

**Teachers shape a future**

“My father taught school in Seward, and my mother was in education at AVTEC, the Alaska Vocational Technical Center in Seward. They are both amazing teachers and lifelong learners who had a huge impact on who I am today.”

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After graduating from Seward High in 1997, Carlyn earned her Bachelor of Arts (with honors) from the University of Denver in Environmental Science, minored in International studies. She studied abroad in Uganda, then returning to Alaska, earned her Master of Arts Teaching Program—Secondary Education from the University of Alaska Southeast.

Carlyn writes, “I was fortunate enough to have many amazing teachers while attending Seward Elementary and Seward Middle-High School. Deb Burdick was a strong, intelligent female role model who challenged and helped me learn to be patient with math. My chemistry teacher Jim Barkman was engaging and the first teacher to really push and prepare me for a college education in science. Wayne Clark was an incredible Spanish teacher. We learned more Spanish from two years of high school with him than any college course. He was on the cutting edge of differentiation and engagement; we danced, we cooked, we played, we drew and it was reason we retained so much. I have fashioned much of my classroom philosophy and strategies from his model. I teach in this district because the one and only Martha Fleming encouraged me to apply and work at Seward High, and how could I say no to her or ignore her advice?”

### **Activities and co-curriculars offer challenges and experiences to contour a life**

“The experiences that were the most important to who I am happened outside the classroom. While a student of KPBSD, I traveled to Magadan, Russia, acted in plays, produced yearbooks and newsletters, visited Washington DC twice—one time as a volunteer at President Clinton’s Inauguration. I played sports, wrote for the local paper, sang and played instruments, and practiced being a leader in student government. There is no way I would be the teacher or mom I am today without all those experiences and challenges. When I look back through my photo albums the most powerful memories and crucial moments are my extra-curricular activities. They showed me what I could do and who I was.”

### **Tip to young learners**

Grab every opportunity to expand your world and perspective beyond our great state and communities. Some of us grow up in small towns but it does not mean we have to limit ourselves to what is here. It is important to go beyond your comfort zone and geography to find programs that truly help you discover who you are or show you what you can do.

***Try as many sports, clubs, and experiences that you can to find what really makes you happy, do not limit yourself to what you think is your thing. Do not limit yourself to what is here, seek beyond, but never forget what a gift is to grow up in Alaska.***

Finally, seek out mentors—adults who are not in your family who understand you or share your interests or goals. Each mentor challenges and nourishes us in a unique way, all of which leads to a richer life.

### **Links:**

- Connect: [Scisamurai.com](http://Scisamurai.com), and [@scisamurai](https://twitter.com/scisamurai) via Twitter
- Read: [Kenai 2018 BP Teacher of Excellence story](#)

*Do you have a story tip about a KPBSD graduate to profile in our Wednesday Inspiration? Kindly email Pegge Erkeneff, KPBSD communications liaison, [Pegge@KPBSD.org](mailto:Pegge@KPBSD.org).*

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