

Media Release

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NEWS RELEASE — FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, Oct. 1, 2020

Lexington District One names Stroud District Teacher of the Year

LEXINGTON, S.C. — Lexington County School District One proudly named Gilbert High School’s Dani G. Stroud its District Teacher of the Year.

Superintendent Dr. Gregory Little surprised Stroud at GHS on Thursday, Oct. 1, to share the exciting news. Stroud, a 13-year science educator, now goes on to compete at the state-level Teacher of the Year competition.

As a child, Stroud didn’t dream of becoming an educator despite being raised by a special education teacher. Instead, she discovered a passion for science at an early age.

“I was a nerd before it was cool — complete with a Smithsonian T-shirt featuring a Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton,” said Stroud. “My mom always made sure I had a book in my hand, puzzles in my closet and a microscope.”

Her love of science led her to double major in chemistry and biochemistry at the College of Charleston, with plans of becoming a doctor.

“After three years of college classes, pretty decent grades and some time to reflect on what I truly wanted, I decided that becoming a doctor was what my family wanted, not something that I truly felt called to do,” said Stroud.

She decided to seek a Master of Arts in teaching from the University of South Carolina so that she could “teach until I figured out what I wanted to do as a career.” But during her student teaching, she realized her calling.

“I found my love of teaching science,” said Stroud. “I am forever thankful for the unexpected twists and turns that brought me to a profession I love.”

In 1999, she began her career as a science teacher at Ridge View High School in Richland School District Two. In 2012, she joined Lexington District One as a science teacher at Gilbert High School.

(MORE)

Page 2 — Lexington District One names Stroud District Teacher of the Year

Throughout her career, she taught various sciences, including chemistry, physics, astronomy, physical science and more. She currently teaches AP physics, essentials in science and unified science at GHS. She focuses on sparking a passion of exploration and lifelong learning in each of her students.

“I believe every one of them deserves to have someone believe in them, nurture their talents and give them a space where they can be heard,” Stroud said. “My classroom is where students can create, explore, fail, try again, grow and celebrate.”

She also believes that, like her students, she must continue to learn, grow and change to become a better teacher each year.

“Every year in the classroom is a culmination of the years past and yet, the foundation for the years ahead. Thus, teaching and learning changes every year,” said Stroud. “When I first started teaching, my goal was to have lesson plans, lab activities and tests ‘ready to go’ — regardless of who was in my class and what was going on in the world around you.”

But her classroom experiences quickly shifted her beliefs and goals as an educator. She realized that students must first know you care about them before they can truly learn from you.

“Teachers must actively listen and take time to find out if their students are artists, athletes, musicians or actors. Do they like military history or have a desire to be a cosmetologist? All of these things should guide your lessons, make learning more engaging and give you deeper connections with students.”

She encourages her students to look at the world through the eyes of a scientist, then use logic and evidence in making decisions. She uses current events in her daily teaching to prove “the interconnectedness of the world.”

“Is there a hurricane coming? I may take a moment to teach them how to find scientific and reliable information on the internet, to accurately read a variety of maps, to help them make plans for emergency preparations. Or is there current legislation that may affect them — such as a ban on handheld devices while driving? What is the evidence behind the ban? I let them design and carry out experiments to see if their results support or negate the evidence.”

Stroud approaches each day as a scientist — examining the proof of what worked yesterday and changing the variables, if needed, to improve the outcome for tomorrow. As a result, her teaching continues to evolve, much to the benefit of her students.

“I am just doing what a teacher is supposed to do: be passionate about my subject area and, above all else, care deeply about my students.”

The GHS Class of 2020 voted her their “Most Influential and Inspirational Teacher,” proving that Stroud’s students care deeply about her, too.

Congratulations to all of our 2019–2020 Teacher of the Year honorees.

Though COVID-19 unfortunately forced the cancellation of the annual Teacher of the Year event at the end of the 2019–2020 school year, Lexington District One continues to celebrate the accomplishments of our 31 school-level Teachers of the Year.

(MORE)

Page 3 — Lexington District One names Stroud District Teacher of the Year

Those honorees included Beechwood Middle Special Education Teacher Anné M. Peterson, Carolina Springs Elementary Resource Teacher Haley R. Lawson, Carolina Springs Middle Theatre Teacher Jennifer S. Simmons, Deerfield Elementary First Grade Teacher Bethany B. Paetow, Forts Pond Elementary STEM Teacher Helen E. Siceloff, Gilbert Elementary Fourth Grade Teacher Kristen E. Smalley, Gilbert High Science Teacher Dani G. Stroud, Gilbert Middle Speech Teacher Bridgette L. Lim, Gilbert Primary First Grade Teacher Whitney T. Umbarger, Lake Murray Elementary Lead Interventionist Carolyn A. Carroll, Lexington Elementary Music Teacher Kristen M. Williams, Lexington High IB Program Coordinator and Social Studies Teacher Derek M. Allison, Lexington Middle Seventh Grade Language Arts Teacher Stephanie E. Ascolese, Lexington Technology Center Business Education Teacher Deborah K. Cronin, Meadow Glen Elementary First Grade Immersion Partner Teacher Shannon B. Cornelius, Meadow Glen Middle Special Education Teacher Anna B. Stackhouse, Midway Elementary Kindergarten Teacher Melissa L. Livingston, New Providence Elementary Second Grade Teacher Allison M. Blewett, Oak Grove Elementary Kindergarten Teacher Mary P. Dudley, Pelion Elementary Second Grade Teacher Nicole H. Shumpert, Pelion High Special Education Teacher Traci D. Holcomb, Pelion Middle Eighth Grade Science Teacher Jennifer L. May, Pleasant Hill Elementary Fifth Grade Science Teacher Jennifer H. Farmer, Pleasant Hill Middle Resource Teacher Tricia A. Lanum, Red Bank Elementary Special Education Teacher Britani A. Magargle, River Bluff High Social Studies Teacher Keith J. Brayman Jr., Rocky Creek Elementary Third Grade Teacher Whitney G. Seddon, Saxe Gotha Elementary Kindergarten Teacher Jacquelyn D. Moran, White Knoll Elementary Special Education Teacher Danika M. Olafson, White Knoll High Social Studies Teacher Walter J. Allen and White Knoll Middle Special Education Teacher Bonnie L. Slyce.

Teams of judges scored the school-level TOY written application forms using an established rubric. The two school-level TOYs with the highest scores from each team became the top 10 finalists. These finalists included [Ascolese](#), [Cornelius](#), [Farmer](#), [Holcomb](#), [Livingston](#), [Magargle](#), [Olafson](#), [Peterson](#), [Seddon](#) and [Stroud](#).

Teams of judges then assessed the finalists in three categories — paperwork, interview and classroom observation — to determine the district-level Teacher of the Year.

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