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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Commissioner Johnson Announces Finalists for Teacher of the Year

ANCHORAGE – Stephanie Cronin, Eric Filardi, and James Harris are the finalists for Alaska Teacher of the Year for 2017, Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson announced today at the Alaska Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teachers and Teaching convening.

“These finalists for teachers of the year represent their profession and remind us of the many great teachers in Alaska,” Commissioner Johnson said in a statement. “We see a common thread of teachers who are enthusiastic about their subject and about learning. They relate to students and place a priority on creating a healthy community in the classroom. They are leaders in their school and community.”

Ms. Cronin has taught mathematics and engineering at Seward High School for 17 of her 19 years in the profession. She is a leader in her community and district, serving on committees for effective instruction, teacher evaluation, professional development, assessment, curriculum, and educational technology, the school site council, and the local Native Youth Olympics.

Ms. 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.

Ms. Cronin has been 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.

Mr. Filardi, an 11-year professional, teaches high school English and engineering at Nenana City Public School. He also directs a counseling grant, with a focus on trauma, resiliency, and adverse childhood experiences. He runs a monthly student coffee house open to the community and is on a community committee to facilitate youth wellness.

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Mr. Filardi says his greatest contribution to education has been to develop his classroom as a community of opportunity, preparing students for life. He inspires students to be satisfied well-rounded people, able to think critically and to be intentional with their lives. He leads students to see how the skills and knowledge they gain in school can be used productively in a range of situations.

A trauma-informed teacher, Mr. Filardi cultivates a culture of caring and compassion in the classroom. The social and emotional health of his students is a priority. He says, “Creating relationships that enhance learning through attention, affection, and attunement is the key ingredient in creating resiliency in children.”

Mr. Harris, a 12-year professional, 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.

Mr. Harris said he overcame a tumultuous childhood with the help of several teachers who could see the goodness and potential in him. He 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. Mr. 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 larger human community.

The finalists were selected by a team of educators from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. Twelve teachers were nominated.

The finalists will be interviewed by Amy Jo Meiners, 2016 Alaska Teacher of the Year; Tim Parker, NEA Alaska President; and John Kito of the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals. They will recommend a Teacher of the Year and an Alternate Teacher of the Year to Commissioner Johnson.

The Alaska Teacher of the Year may be called upon to speak at education conferences and participate in various statewide education working groups. The teacher is the Alaska nominee for national teacher of the year. The Alternate Teacher of the Year would serve as Alaska Teacher of the Year if the latter were named National Teacher of the Year.

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