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## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**December 6, 2016**

### **James Harris of Soldotna Named Teacher of the Year** *Stephanie Cronin of Seward is Alternate Teacher of the Year*

JUNEAU -- James Harris has been named Alaska Teacher of the Year for 2017, Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson announced today at a ceremony in Soldotna.

The Alaska Teacher of the Year may be called upon to speak at education conferences and participate in various statewide education working groups, and is 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.

"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."

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."

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.

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

EDUCATION  
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Fairbanks, and a master of arts degree in teaching from the University of Alaska Southeast.

“James Harris will be an excellent representative of the high-quality teachers that we have in Alaska. His enthusiasm for the profession and passion for student learning will benefit students across the state,” said Tim Parker, NEA-Alaska President.

"I am excited for Mr. Harris' upcoming year as 2017 Alaska Teacher of the Year. He has a compassion for all students and is an inspiring educator. He will represent Alaska teachers well," said Amy Jo Meiners of Juneau, Alaska's Teacher of the Year for 2016.

Stephanie Cronin has been named Alternate Alaska Teacher of the Year for 2017. She will serve as Alaska Teacher of the Year if Mr. Harris is named national Teacher of the Year.

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.

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.

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.

Twelve teachers were nominated for Alaska Teacher of the Year. Three finalists were 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 recommended a Teacher of the Year and an Alternate Teacher of the Year to Commissioner Johnson, who accepted the recommendations.

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