



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DEED Announces Finalists for 2018 Teacher of the Year

JUNEAU – Kent Fielding, Karen Martin, Eric Rush, and Ben Walker are the finalists for the 2018 Alaska Teacher of the Year.

“It’s an honor to recognize these exceptional teachers,” said Alaska Education Commissioner Michael Johnson. “Mr. Fielding, Ms. Martin, Mr. Rush, and Mr. Walker are models of outstanding teaching and leadership, and selflessly serve their students and their communities.”

Mr. Fielding has taught high school English and history in the Skagway School District for 12 of his 18 years in the profession. He has taught numerous AP courses, led student trips overseas, and coached regional and state champions in cross country, track and field, and drama, debate, and forensics. His commitment to his students extends well beyond the classroom walls.

Mr. Fielding’s colleagues describe his passion for positively influencing students as his biggest impact on the Skagway community. This past spring, he led a group of students to the Marshall Islands to study the impact of climate change. In order to make the trip a reality, he helped his students fundraise for over 18 months to cover the trip’s expenses. The students described the trip as life changing, and returned home inspired to present their findings, help elevate awareness, and even make sustainable improvements to their own community.

“For me, getting education to go beyond the classroom is the whole point of education – we need to create life-long learners,” said Mr. Fielding in his application. “We have the fundamental task of inspiring students to reach potentials, of transforming student lives, of giving students opportunities that they didn’t know existed.”

Ms. Martin, a 12-year professional, teaches fourth grade at Tri-Valley School. She also leads the Denali Borough School District’s (DBSD) professional learning group, with a focus on professionalizing teaching by creating an intellectual culture that changes teacher mindsets through research and inquiry. In 2014, she received a Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching to live in Finland and research education. She returned to Finland in summer 2017 as a Fund for Teacher Fellow.

Ms. Martin is passionate about creating a caring, intellectual culture and nurturing productive beliefs about learning. Making thinking visible through conversation, writing, and reflection are critical components of her classroom. “Karen develops a growth mindset in her students,” said

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DBSD Superintendent Dan Polta in his letter of recommendation. “Karen supports her colleagues in the same way.”

“I trust my students to be leaders in their own learning,” said Ms. Martin in her application. “I believe my students hold the collective ability, with careful scaffolding and teaching, to solve difficult problems together.”

Mr. Rush, an eight-year professional, teaches third grade at Ticasuk Brown Elementary in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. Incorporating technology into his classroom is an essential part of his instruction, allowing him to connect students to different ways of learning. In addition, his belief in personalized learning allows him to reach every student at their current skill level. By tailoring his instruction to meet each student’s learning needs, they are able to own their learning and be motivated by their own personal success.

“Personalized instruction is the foundation of my teaching philosophy. It drives all of my decisions on how to best approach and interact with each student because I don’t teach to a class, I teach to the individual,” said Mr. Rush in his application.

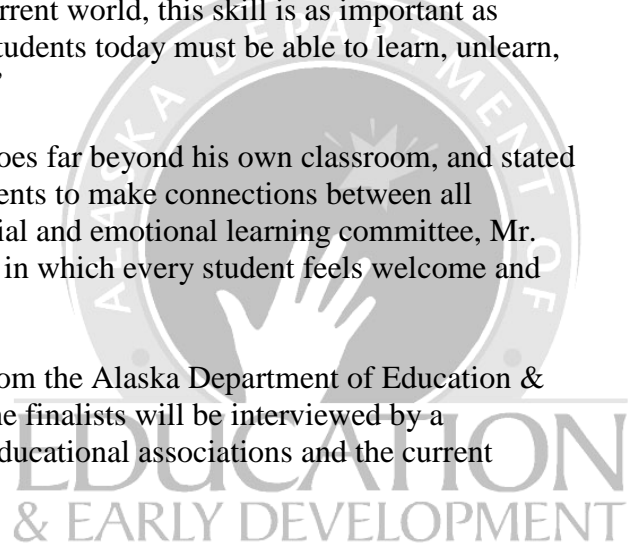
As part of his school’s personalized learning committee, Mr. Rush has the opportunity to encourage fellow educators on their path to personalized learning in their classroom. He started a YouTube channel where teachers can collaborate in a global professional learning community and share new ideas for their classroom so every student achieves success. Mr. Rush’s colleagues describe him as a “transformational teacher leader,” and emphasize his passion and enthusiasm as inspiring and contagious.

Mr. Walker has spent his 11-year career at Romig Middle School in the Anchorage School District where he teaches seventh grade science, as well as applied technology, robotics, and media technology. He serves on the schools social and emotional learning committee, organizes STEM Career Day, and leads the MathCOUNTS program. Mr. Walker was the 2013 Alaska Awardee for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

Mr. Walker challenges his students to be active participants in their learning by providing experiential learning opportunities that are relevant and of interest to each learner. “My goal is to help students learn to learn on their own as in our current world, this skill is as important as information,” said Mr. Walker in his application. “Students today must be able to learn, unlearn, and relearn to remain competitive in the workplace.”

Mr. Walker’s colleagues recognize that his impact goes far beyond his own classroom, and stated that he “continually collaborates and strives for students to make connections between all subjects.” An integral participant in the school’s social and emotional learning committee, Mr. Walker focuses on a healthy, positive school culture in which every student feels welcome and successful.

The finalists were selected by a team of educators from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. 24 teachers were nominated. The finalists will be interviewed by a committee composed of members of major Alaska educational associations and the current



Alaska Teacher of the Year, James Harris. 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, and serves as a member of Commissioner Johnson's Teacher Advisory Council. The Alternate Teacher of the Year would serve as Alaska Teacher of the Year if the latter were named National Teacher of the Year.

Alaska Teacher of the Year program: <https://education.alaska.gov/recognitionprograms/TOY/>.

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