



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Danielle Riha of Anchorage Named Teacher of the Year
Jacob Bera is Alternate Teacher of the Year

JUNEAU – Danielle Riha has been named the 2019 Alaska Teacher of the Year by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. The announcement was made today in a surprise ceremony at the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School.

Before moving to Anchorage, Ms. Riha spent seven years as an educator in Togiak and New Stuyahok for the Southwest Region School District. In 2008, she came to Anchorage to help develop and open the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School (ANCCS). At ANCCS she currently teaches seventh and eighth grade language arts, social studies, science, and math.

Ms. Riha inspires everyone at her school, including fellow staff, to be their best selves and to learn how to master personal challenges by recognizing strengths and working through difficulties. Of learning, she says “Teachers are learners too, constantly working on how to reach students based on academic, social, and cultural needs.”

“Danielle works tirelessly to build meaningful relationships with all students and make all subjects relevant to their lives through cultural connections,” said Ben Walker, Alaska’s 2018 Teacher of the Year. “To hear that students are learning math and literacy through cultural connections to their backgrounds and ancestry reminds me that a teacher’s role is not to make students like us, but to help them become the best version of themselves.”

Ms. Riha holds a Bachelors of Education from the University of Alaska Anchorage, a Masters of Education from Grand Canyon University, and is working on her Doctorate of Education at Cappella University.

The Alaska Teacher of the Year may be called upon to speak at education conferences and participate in various statewide education working groups. The Alaska Teacher of the Year is the state’s nominee for National Teacher of the Year, and serves as a member of Commissioner Johnson’s Teacher Advisory Council.

Jacob Bera, fine arts teacher at Eagle River High School, has been named the 2019 Alternate Alaska Teacher of the Year. He will serve as Alaska Teacher of the Year if Ms. Riha is named National Teacher of the Year.

Mr. Bera started his teaching career at Mountain View and William Tyson Elementary in Anchorage. In 2005, he was hired to open Eagle River High School as the Fine Arts Department Chair. Since then, Mr. Bera has built a comprehensive visual arts program that serves students of all abilities, including a successful AP Studio Art program.

Five finalists for 2019 Teacher of the Year were interviewed by Ben Walker, 2018 Alaska Teacher of the Year; Michael Swain, President of the Association of Alaska School Boards; Candy Bracken, President of Alaska PTA; Tim Parker, President of NEA-Alaska; and Deanna Beck, 2016-2018 President of the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals. The committee considered a written application, presentation, video, and interview from each finalist. 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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