

Dr. Michael Johnson  
*Commissioner*



Department of Education  
and Early Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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### **DEED Announces Finalists for 2020 Teacher of the Year**

JUNEAU -- Amy Gallaway, West Valley High School in Fairbanks; Pamela Garcia, Auke Bay Elementary School in Juneau; and Ben Griese, "Chief" Ivan Blunka School in New Stuyahok; are the finalists for the 2020 Alaska Teacher of the Year.

Amy Gallaway started her Alaskan career in 1993 as an archeologist in Wrangell St. Elias National Park, but it was her seasonal job as a teacher's aide in Glennallen School that changed her life. She left archeology and earned her teacher certification from the University of Alaska in 1999, and took her first teaching job in Nuiqsut, an Inupiaq village on the Colville River. It was there, through the passion of her students and their desire to build a strong community that she discovered civic education as her calling, a way to empower not just students but also the whole community.

In 2002, Ms. Gallaway started working for the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. She currently works at West Valley High School where she teaches history, government, and career education to 9-12 grade students. Because she believes learning should be empowering, relevant, and community oriented, she is a teacher mentor for the national "We the People" civics program, which emphasizes critical thinking and culminates with a simulated congressional hearing with community judges. By instructing and implementing this program, she empowers both students and teachers by connecting them with mayors, legislators, and community leaders. Many of her students go beyond voting and are now leaders of their own, building a community dedicated to justice and opportunity.

Ms. Gallaway holds a bachelor's degree from Northern Arizona University and a master's degree in teaching from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Pamela Garcia has taught in the Juneau School District in a variety of roles for twenty years. She is currently a special education resource teacher at Auke Bay Elementary School in Juneau. After six years as a paraeducator, Ms. Garcia became a classroom teacher and taught students in grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 during a span of 12 years. She then became an instructional coach and provided professional development to K-5 teachers through model lessons in classrooms, professional learning communities, and district in-services for seven years. She now uses her expertise to teach high-need students with high-impact teaching practices. Ms. Garcia continues to collaborate with teachers, principals, and district committees to improve equity for all learners.

In addition to her work in the Juneau School District, Ms. Garcia has served as an adjunct instructor for the University of Alaska Southeast, a national staff developer for Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), an afterschool Leading Educational Access Project (LEAP) instructor, co-president of the Juneau/Haines Reading Council, a regional representative for the Alaska Council of

Teachers of Mathematics, and a statewide instructor for both Alaska Basic Math Institutes and Alaska Seas and Rivers curriculum.

Ms. Garcia holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in mathematics education from the University of Alaska Southeast. She has 139 post-graduate credits to her name, and is currently working on completing her graduate certificate in special education. "There is always more to learn!" is the mantra that keeps her growing.

Ben Griese has devoted ten years to serving the communities within Southwest Region School District, most notably as a prek-12 special education teacher at "Chief" Ivan Blunka School in New Stuyahok. Mr. Griese dedicates himself to supporting the unique needs of the students, staff, and communities in his district. This includes fundraisers for field trips, traveling by snow machine during storms to other villages to provide afterschool literacy events, and developing school-wide disability awareness initiatives.

At the foundation of his practice, Mr. Griese teaches self-advocacy and inclusion for all students. He ensures that students with disabilities are included and successful in academic, social, athletic, and subsistence activities. Mr. Griese is always willing to learn from and mentor staff members throughout the district.

For the 2013-2014 school year, Mr. Griese received Teacher of the Year honors from both the Alaska Council for Exceptional Children and Southwest Region School District. During the 2016-2017 school year, he was named Teacher of the Year for "Chief" Ivan Blunka School. In 2018, Mr. Griese and his teaching partner were recognized with the State of Alaska's prestigious Inclusive Practice Award. Mr. Griese holds a bachelor's degree in special education teaching from Purdue University.

A committee composed of Alaska's 2019 Teacher of the Year, Danielle Riha, and members of major Alaska educational associations will interview the finalists. The committee considers a written application, a video snapshot of the teacher in the classroom, and an interview. They will recommend a 2020 Alaska Teacher of the Year and an alternate to Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael 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 Alaska Department of Education and Early Development provides information, resources, and leadership to support over 130,000 students in 505 public schools across the state of Alaska. The mission of the department is to ensure an "Excellent Education for Every Student Every Day."*

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