



State of Alaska
Department of Education & Early Development



Dr. Michael Johnson
Commissioner

Erin Hardin
Information Officer
907.465.6535
erin.hardin@alaska.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 12, 2017

Ben Walker of Anchorage Named Teacher of the Year

Eric Rush of Fairbanks is Alternate Teacher of the Year

JUNEAU -- Ben Walker has been named the 2018 Alaska Teacher of the Year, Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson announced today in a surprise ceremony at Romig Middle School.

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.

"When Ben Walker says ALL students deserve the opportunity to learn, he means ALL students," said Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson. "Mr. Walker is a champion for equity and teaches in a way that recognizes the value and worth of every single student. As our 2018 Alaska Teacher of the Year, he will be a powerful voice advocating for an excellent education for every student every day."

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 school's social and emotional learning committee, organizes STEM Career Day, and helps organize the MathCOUNTS program. Mr. Walker was the 2013 Alaska Awardee for the Presidential Award for Excellence in 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. He says, "My goal is to help students learn to learn on their own as in our current world, this skill is as important as information. Students today must be able to learn, unlearn, and relearn to remain competitive in the workplace."

Mr. Walker holds a bachelor of arts degree in biology from Whitman College and a master of arts degree in teaching from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

"Ben is truly an exceptional teacher, who embodies the genuine passion, dedication, and skills of Alaskan educators," said James Harris, Alaska's 2017 Teacher of the Year. "Ben's engagement with parents, his larger vision of community partnerships, and his collaboration with his colleagues encompass Alaska's goals to collectively enrich our students' lives and enhance our common future."

"Ben is creative, brings rigor to the forefront, and is humble in his approach when working with all students. His talent and work honors the profession of teaching," said Tammy Smith, NEA-Alaska State Director.

Eric Rush has been named the 2018 Alternate Alaska Teacher of the Year. He will serve as Alaska Teacher of the Year if Mr. Walker is named National Teacher of the Year.

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. He says, "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."

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 holds a bachelor of arts degree in liberal studies from the University of Alaska Anchorage and a master of education degree from the University of Alaska Southeast.

24 teachers were nominated for Alaska Teacher of the Year. Four finalists were interviewed by James Harris, 2017 Alaska Teacher of the Year; Deanna Beck, Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals President; Candy Jo Bracken, Alaska PTA President; Pete Hoepfner, Association of Alaska School Boards President; and Tammy Smith, NEA-Alaska State Director. 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.

###

