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Six educators named Teacher of the Year finalists

Austin - Six top educators, with a combined 125 years of teaching experience, have been chosen as finalists in the Texas Teacher of the Year program, Commissioner of Education Robert Scott announced today.

The teachers were selected from among 40 regional Teachers of the Year. The finalists will now vie for the honor of being named Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year and the Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year.

The secondary education finalists are:

- Christine Gleason, an English teacher at Fabens High School in the Fabens Independent School District, which is near El Paso;
- Iris Hines, an English teacher at the Roosevelt Alternative School in the Mission Consolidated ISD;
- Debbie Perry, who at the time she was named a regional Teacher of the Year, was a mathematics teacher at Travis Junior High in Paris ISD. This fall, Perry began teaching geometry at Midway High School in Waco's Midway ISD.

The elementary school finalists are:

- Beth Dennis, a fifth-grade teacher at Thomas Justiss Elementary in Paris ISD;
- Janet Napoli, a literacy teacher for kindergarten through fifth-grade students at Skaggs Elementary School in Plano ISD;
- Dora Alicia Newell, a third-grade teacher at Thigpen-Zavala Elementary School in McAllen ISD.

"I congratulate these six outstanding teachers who have made a difference in the lives of thousands of students. They are representative of the many dedicated teachers who staff Texas classrooms," said Scott. "This program, through the support of our generous sponsors, provides a way to publicly recognize and thank these dedicated, creative individuals."

In their Teacher of the Year applications, each educator offered insight into their teaching philosophy and style.

Gleason, the Fabens High teacher, writes: "I am a teacher and can relate any piece of literature to teenage life in under 50 minutes. I do it with laughter, poise and integrity. Most importantly, though, I talk *to* my students. They know I genuinely care about them and their issues."

Hines of the Roosevelt Alternative School calls herself "a dyslexia survivor. I know that the countless profound struggles that I overcame taught me to know exactly how it feels to exist

in a world where acquiring information is constantly impeded by something that is initially beyond one's control.”

Perry, the Travis Junior High mathematics teacher, writes: “In my classroom we celebrate heroic actions such as kindness, gentleness, helpfulness, and courage so that students can see that one does not have to be smart, beautiful, affluent, or even talented to be a hero.”

Dennis, the Paris fifth-grade teacher, said in her application: “I want to cultivate a love of learning in the lives of my students. I want them to question, create, explore and become problem solvers, not simply in my classroom, but throughout their lives.”

Napoli of Plano describes her motivation this way: “Creating a community of learners who are empowered to seek out the best for themselves is what drives the things I do in the classroom. Students are sponges. It is my job to help them absorb the most powerful ‘tools’ that help them reach their learning potential.”

Newell from McAllen involves herself in all aspects of her students' lives. “I am determined that each day each one of my students will get my absolute best. They will remember me ...with a smiling face, a kind heart and a genuine desire to form them into the best citizens they can be. If I need to nurture, I do. If I need to find appropriate clothing for them, I do. If I need to seek out ways to provide glasses or even pay an electricity bill, I do.”

These six finalists were selected by a panel of judges who represent the state's four teacher organizations. The judges were Brian Baker of the Texas AFT; Jerry Bonham of the Association of Texas Professional Educators; Jan Pate of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association; and Stephen Smallwood of the Texas State Teachers Association.

The finalists will now be invited to Austin for interviews before a larger judging panel, which will determine the top elementary and secondary teacher. One of the top winners will also be selected to go forward to be considered for National Teacher of the Year honors. The national program is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers.

The Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year, the Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year, the remaining four finalists and the other regional Teachers of the Year will be honored at a luncheon Nov. 22 at the Connally Banquet Hall in the University of Texas' Etter-Harbin Alumni Center.

The Texas Education Agency has sponsored the Texas Teacher of the Year program since 1969.

During the luncheon, each of the regional winners will receive a \$500 check and a trophy. The top two teachers will receive a \$5,000 cash prize, a technology package valued at more than \$15,000 and a trophy.

The Teacher of the Year program is supported by its generous donors who include AT&T, H-E-B, the SMARTer Kids Foundation, Dell and the state's major education associations.

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