

NEWS RELEASE

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2019 GCPS Teacher of the Year:

Heidi Campbell named Gwinnett County's top teacher

A high school teacher who never runs out of smiles or tires of offering a friendly “hello” has been named the 2019 Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year (TOTY). During the annual Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year banquet, **Gwinnett County Public Schools CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks** announced **Heidi Campbell of Parkview High School** as the recipient of the school system's highest teaching honor. The announcement took place during the annual celebration on

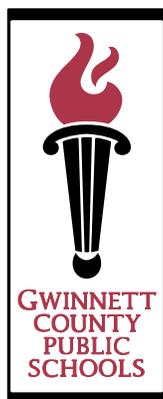


Thursday, November 8, 2018, at the Infinite Energy Forum in Duluth. In all, the school district recognized 137 local school Teachers of the Year who were joined by loved ones, local school and central office administrators, and the Gwinnett County Board of Education.

Prior to earning the school system's top honor, Mrs. Campbell was first named the 2019 Gwinnett County High School Teacher of the Year. She was selected as Gwinnett's top teacher from a group of six finalists which had been narrowed to three level winners. **Kelly Specht of Riverside Elementary School** is Gwinnett's 2019 Elementary School Teacher of the Year and **Lindsey Saa of Couch Middle School** is Gwinnett's 2019 Middle School Teacher of the Year.

The TOTY selection process began at the start of the school year when thousands of teachers from throughout the district nominated and selected 137 teachers to represent their local schools. A selection committee later narrowed the group to 25 semifinalists, and finally to the six finalists. In addition to the three level winners (Mrs. Campbell, Mrs. Specht, and Ms. Saa), the other three finalists were **Meredith White of Peachtree Ridge High School**, **Juah Nyemadé Baker-Marsh of Lovin Elementary School**, and **Chandra Brandel of Coleman Middle School**.

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GWINNETT COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR AND

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

**Heidi Campbell, Journalism and British Literature
Teacher at Parkview High School**



Small things are important to Heidi Campbell. She says they help build relationships which is why every day she meets her students at the door to her classroom with a smile. She shares, “Connections will naturally happen if teachers engage with their students in and out of the classroom. Getting to know my students enables me to create engaging lessons that appeal to their learning styles.”

Campbell has been an educator for nearly a quarter century, with 18 of those 24 years with GCPS. The Parkview High School Journalism and British Literature teacher spent 15 years at Brookwood High School before accepting a position at Parkview.

Campbell will tell you she doesn’t allow fear to prevent her from teaching students. “The idea that I might create an assignment that lies beyond my core proficiency is terrifying, yet it is my duty to adapt lessons for students who are far more technologically savvy than I am,” Campbell said. “I forge ahead into the unknown and allow my students to learn skills through experiential learning activities.” Her practice of not always being the “expert” in the room has benefited her students. For example, she found a project idea that called on students to create podcasts, using *The Birthmark* by Hawthorne. She explains, “While creating podcasts was a foreign concept to me, my students absolutely ran with this project. . . I allowed them to explore a story I knew well using a medium, podcasting, which I did not know well. The result was a lesson that incorporated background knowledge, collaboration, modeling and practice, questioning, and problem-solving for my students.

Campbell has a passion for journalism which fueled her mission to revamp and expand Parkview High’s student newspaper and to pitch the idea of a second journalism class. Her enthusiasm and passion for student writing has helped grow the journalism program, while also building the capacity of student-reporters as they began to believe in themselves and see the value that they brought to campus. She credits the hard work and dedication of her students for the success of her school’s journalism program. “In 2017, our newspaper won the first-place ranking of Superior at the state level, that was the first time our school had ever won such an award,” Campbell said. As a result, the program for both journalism classes has grown from 14 students to nearly 60 students in three years. In fact, Campbell shares that “Competition became fierce to get into the journalism class, and I had to turn away far too many potential journalists.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Kelly Specht, Reading Recovery and Early Intervention Program Teacher at Riverside Elementary School

As a Reading Recovery Teacher, Kelly Specht's job is to help struggling students learn how to read. But it's her passion, dedication, and commitment to connect with each student that has helped change lives. In two of the three years Specht has taught Reading Recovery at Riverside Elementary School, 100% of her students have met the criteria for exiting the program within 20 weeks.



A veteran teacher with nearly three decades of experience, Mrs. Specht has spent 22 of those years with GCPS. She started her career teaching 4th and 5th grade students in Michigan before coming to Gwinnett in 1996. She spent that first year splitting time at Walnut Grove Elementary School and Suwanee Elementary School, teaching Special Education to students in grades 2-4. From 1997 to 1999, she taught Special Education students at Walnut Grove Elementary. In 1999 she left the school to teach in California, returning to Walnut Grove Elementary in 2000 to become a Student Support Team Coordinator. In 2001, she transferred to Riverside Elementary to serve as a Special Education Teacher until moving to her current role in 2015.

Finding ways to engage students in the act of reading has always been a part of Specht's agenda as a teacher. She explains, "I constantly search for opportunities to connect students with good books, increase reading engagement, and make reading a significant part of the school culture." Her involvement as her school's Reader's Rally coach and her work with the afterschool reading club are just a few ways that she extends reading to students. She says, "I am extremely thrilled to be a part of a school culture that honors reading, and also inspires students to become lifelong learners.

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Lindsey Saa, Social Studies Teacher at Couch Middle School

Lindsey Saa is a proud graduate of GCPS. She says the teachers she had in school instilled in her the passion, hard work, and dedication that helped fuel her success, and that these are the same qualities she now instills in her students. She adds, "As a teacher, I choose to lead my students by showing them my passion for history and learning, my hard work in the lessons I create



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and implement, and my dedication to making sure that each of them is successful.”

Saa started teaching in GCPS in 2007 at Snellville Middle School before moving to Couch Middle in 2012. The 8th grade Social Studies teacher has a bachelors in Secondary Education with an emphasis on Social Sciences from Valdosta State University, a masters in Integration of Technology from Walden University and a Specialists certificate in Curriculum and Instruction from Capella University.

Saa’s teaching philosophy is built on her use of innovative teaching strategies and her passion for history. She personally challenges herself to create new captivating lessons that reach each individual student. For example, during her Road to Independence lesson, students work as crime scene investigators to study a picture of an American Revolution battle scene, reviewing “evidence” and completing a list of tasks. She says, “The ultimate goal at the end of this lesson is not only for students to gain mastery of the standard, but to build life skills of problem solving, collaborating, questioning, and analytical thinking that will be able to cross over to other content areas and aspects of their lives.”

Saa says her biggest contribution to education has been her work helping to develop the new 8th Grade Social Studies Curriculum Guide. She adds, “My vision to help others does not stop inside the walls of my school. Gwinnett’s vision to become a system of world-class schools is the very reason that I seek ways to help other Social Studies teachers in the county.”

As Gwinnett County’s 2019 Teacher of the Year, Campbell will now compete for the Georgia title. She will receive an annual award of \$1,000 and the other two level winners will each receive \$750 each year, for as long as they are employed with GCPS. The finalists will receive a one-time award of \$500. The five finalists who did not win the county honor also will receive a \$250 grocery store gift card and gift basket. Each local school winner will receive a one-time award of \$200, a plaque, and a TOTY cup.

As the overall winner, Campbell also will receive a crystal peach, a \$500 grocery store gift card and gift basket, a commemorative ring, a laptop computer, and the use of a new car for one year. GCPS would like to thank this year’s sponsors, including the presenting sponsor Peach State Federal Credit Union, for their support of great teachers and for making this celebration of outstanding teaching possible. Sponsors include:

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