



For immediate release

Monday, September 10, 2018

www.sde.idaho.gov

Media Contact

Kristin Rodine

Public Information Officer

208-332-6807

krodine@sde.idaho.gov

Idaho Teacher of the Year helps shape curriculum, community and students' futures

(BOISE) – Idaho’s newly announced 2019 Teacher of the Year offers a distinctive blend of credentials and characteristics that make him stand out: In addition to being a skilled and passionate high school teacher, he leads the state’s most honored FFA program and serves as mayor of American Falls.

“As Idaho Teacher of the Year, Marc Beitia is a perfect fit for this state and the rural community he leads,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said. “And at the same time, he is one-of-a-kind.”

“A proud representative of Career Technical Education, Mr. Beitia exemplifies and strengthens the essential connections between agriculture and academics and between school and community,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “I’m excited to join his students, peers and community in honoring him.”

Superintendent Ybarra surprised Beitia in his classroom at American Falls High School Monday afternoon with the news that he has been chosen to represent Idaho in the National Teacher of the Year competition.

Now entering his 35th year of teaching, Beitia helped create American Falls High’s agriculture education program in 1990 and has been part of the school’s leadership team ever since. As advisor for American Falls’ FFA chapter, he has helped students develop strengths and skills to win numerous state and national honors with a focus on farming knowhow, technology, communication skills and command of agricultural issues.

In each of the past two years, American Falls FFA has been named one of 10 National FFA Model of Excellence finalists and also received a National Premier Chapter Award both years.

Meanwhile Beitia has served for the past six years as the small rural city’s mayor and the preceding six years as a City Council member.

“As a teacher, he strongly believes in the empowerment encouragement can provide for his students, and as a mayor, he encourages his students to take their knowledge outside of the classroom and become better community members of American Falls,” said Odalis Gonzales, a former FFA team member who graduated as valedictorian and now attends Notre Dame University.

Another alumna, Abby Rowe, describes Beitia as “the educator who has had the biggest impact in my life,” helping her to transform from a “timid” small-town freshman to an upperclassman at the University of Idaho, where she has a triple major and lobbies Idaho senators as a leader in an international advocacy group.

Beitia expresses pride in his many students who have gone on to university success but stresses the importance of developing a skilled local workforce, producing graduates who contribute to the local and Idaho economies by filling much-needed roles in area businesses.

“For too long ... students were made to feel less than successful if they did not pursue a four-year college education and a white-collar career,” Beitia wrote in his Teacher of the Year application. “In 2015 the American Falls Agricultural Education Technical Advisory Committee concluded that we had to do a better job of producing graduates ready for the local workforce upon their graduation, as many business and industry partners go wanting for skilled employees with entry level employability skills and the work ethic needed to flourish in the workplace.”

“In a school district that is 70 percent socially economically disadvantaged, many students lack basic life skills, English language proficiency and literacy, role models, and even the means to basic necessities,” Beitia’s application continued. “Through the continued support of farmers and businesses ... no student in his program has to worry about the means or availability of opportunities to build a better life.”

The cycle of benefit flows in both directions. Three bilingual FFA members, including Gonzales, came up with an idea in 2017 that has morphed into an Idaho State University-supported program in which FFA members with Spanish as their first language mentor Hispanic adult workers from major American Falls employers, increasing their English language skills so they can move up in their companies or get GEDs.

“As the employees gain skills and capabilities, so too will they gain more earning potential, thus raising that bar for everyone,” Beitia wrote in the application. “In doing so they will also decrease the number of my students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, consequently providing increased economic stability for our economic community.”

As an educator, Beitia stresses communication and personal skills, teamwork and command of the complexities and technology of modern agriculture, from flying drones and developing software to interpreting satellite imagery. The school district’s new graduation requirements require all freshmen to take the Introduction to Leadership course that Beitia developed.

And he’s part of his school district’s team to develop “a five-year strategic plan that promotes student mastery of life skills, experiential learning opportunities, project-based learning, community outreach and a desire to focus educational opportunities to train the workforce needed by the diverse business and industry partners in our community.”

One hallmark of Beitia’s leadership style is embracing his students for who they are and rejecting artificial barriers to achievement and acceptance, American Falls High teacher Caroline Wight said. He is a champion of diversity and understanding for students who might otherwise be marginalized in a conservative farming community, and his example has been followed by the community, Wight said.

In November 2016, the mayor/teacher wrote an opinion piece in the local newspaper decrying the actions of a group of students who resorted to hateful racist comments at a basketball game. “I am sickened, saddened and ashamed,” Beitia wrote. “As a school, community and society we have to be better than that.”

Fellow teacher Wight sums up Beitia’s impact: “Although he is the mayor, he is the center of American Falls due to the impact he has made as the FFA advisor. He is not afraid to speak his mind. He is not afraid to defend his students, whoever they may be ... They know he has their back, and they have his.”

###