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Superintendent Ybarra announces 2022 Idaho Teacher of the Year

(MERIDIAN) – Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra visited Crossroads Middle School this afternoon to surprise science teacher Todd Knight with a \$1,000 check, balloons and the title of Idaho’s 2022 Teacher of the Year.

Selected by a blue ribbon panel from among 10 finalists, Knight will be a spokesman and representative for Idaho educators and serve as Idaho’s nominee for National Teacher of the Year.

“I love this Teacher of the Year process for reminding us how many truly remarkable teachers we have in Idaho who make education a transformative experience,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “We received about 150 nominations this year that resulted in 39 teacher applications, and learning about these educators’ creativity, passion and impact on students is energizing and inspiring. This year’s winner, Todd Knight, exemplifies those qualities, building relationships and collaboration with students, fellow teachers and the community.”

“Todd has a special gift for engaging and exciting students by finding personalized, relatable ways to communicate scientific data and principles,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “Instead of lecturing about Newton’s Laws of Motion, he inspires students to show what they know, and learn in the process. Some of his students wrote a research paper on how tackling in football demonstrates equal and opposite reactions, while others showed how a Tug-of-War match between equal teams illustrates inertia.”

“In Life Science studies, Todd used the momentum of students’ interest in the movie ‘Jurassic World’ to propel them to an understanding of genetics and heredity, even connecting his class with the world-renowned Harvard geneticist leading a project to insert woolly mammoth DNA into the genome of an Asian elephant.”

Principal Joe Palaia said Knight’s skills are particularly vital at Crossroads, a smaller “school of choice” for students who may struggle in large traditional schools.

“Todd finds ways to kindle curiosity and reignite the spark of learning that many of our students have all but abandoned,” said Palaia, who nominated Knight for Teacher of the Year. Knight said he is

challenged to connect with students who “are nearly ready to give up on their educational experience and, unfortunately, themselves.”

Knight has taught science at Crossroads since 2014 and for the past five years has served as digital technology lead and chair of the science department. Previous leadership positions include math intervention lead and mentor teacher in science.

He was chosen as the West Ada School District’s Teacher of the Year for 2021. His 11-year work history in the district includes jobs teaching fourth grade at Star Elementary and fifth grade at River Valley Elementary.

A graduate of Meridian High School, he earned a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from Boise State University and a master’s of curriculum and instruction in STEM Education from Concordia University.

Colleagues say Knight has a rare combination of strengths that enable him to create a fun, healthy learning environment and find the best way to reach each individual student.

“Mr. Knight not only is proficient in building and maintaining caring and trusting relationships, but he is also statistically smart and data-driven,” said James Orr, Language Arts chair at Crossroads. “(He) has an uncanny mind when it comes to digging deep into what gaps students have and what learning still needs to take place.”

Principal Palaia said Knight frequently collaborates with teachers in other subjects for projects such as a joint effort between his engineering students and a creative writing class to develop pieces and rules for a student-created board game.

“These integrated lessons not only encourage students to ‘un-silo’ their learning, but they also reinforce needed skills for the ISAT,” Palaia said.

As digital technology lead for Crossroads, Knight worked with the school’s instructional coach to develop the Tech Whisperers a group of students trained in handling minor technology issues who have developed into the school’s “geek squad” as well as an advisory class focusing on technology’s roles in society and in their lives.

Knight’s technical knowhow has been particularly important during the pandemic as he offered support and assistance to staff and students, Palaia said.

“We all grow and thrive when we are invested in each other and the curriculum,” Knight said in his application. “My students know I care about them beyond the grade in the book or the butt in the chair. ... They witness this in the time I invest in them and the lessons I develop. ... And they, in turn, show me the same care and commitment.”

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Attached: Photo of 2022 Idaho Teacher of the Year Todd Knight