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**2021 Teacher of the Year immerses students in language, learning and culture**

(HAILEY) – Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra visited Wood River Middle School this morning to surprise Spanish teacher Jorge Pulleiro with the news that he is Idaho’s 2021 Teacher of the Year.

Selected by a blue ribbon panel from among 10 finalists and more than 170 nominees, Pulleiro will be a spokesman and representative for Idaho educators and serve as this state’s nominee for National Teacher of the Year.

“For Jorge and his students, learning a language goes far beyond classroom conversations and learning how to conjugate verbs,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “His work and philosophy exemplify the concept of Dual Immersion: English speakers absorb Spanish language and culture, and English language learners help and learn from their peers.”

“His success is illustrated in his students’ engagement and high test scores, professional development for his fellow teachers, and cultural programs, such as Latin dance classes, that inspire great community involvement and support,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “His passion for learning is contagious.”

Shortly after joining Wood River Middle School’s Dual Immersion Spanish Language Arts program in 2012, Pulleiro began creating an exchange program in which eighth graders spend three weeks in Madrid each March, living with Spanish families to be immersed in the language and culture. Students from Madrid have a parallel experience, living and learning in the Wood River Valley.

“As we continue to live in an increasingly globalized world, cross-cultural competence has become an essential skill for succeeding in the global marketplace,” Pulleiro said in his Teacher of the Year application. “This immersion trip is a great way for students to expand their horizons and can open up a world of personal and professional opportunities. ... It has been a huge success from the beginning.”

Wood River Middle School Principal Fritz Peters said Pulleiro “immediately stabilized and added immense credibility to our award-winning K-12 Dual Immersion Program. ... He always pushes me, as principal, to expand the experiences of our language learners. His creativity, engaging lessons and overall teaching abilities are spectacular.”

“His students overwhelmingly leave his eighth grade classes with Advanced and High Intermediate scores in each domain,” Peters said, adding that those students “have an incredibly high rate of passage on the Spanish Advanced Placement Exam in their freshman or sophomore years.”

The program’s results in closing the achievement gap with English Language Learners are particularly impressive, Peters said, noting that Latino students in the Dual Immersion program consistently score higher than those not participating in the program.

“Our ELL population is very high in Blaine County, and our successes are mostly due to this DI program,” Peters said.

Pulleiro grew up in Argentina and began teaching English in that country when he was 19. He later taught Spanish and Italian at the LDS Missionary Training Center at Brigham Young University. He served six years in the U.S. Army, then returned to teaching through the Troops to Teachers program. He taught Spanish and student leadership at Grant Union High School in Oregon before joining Wood River Middle School eight years ago.

In 2014, he was honored by the White House and the Department of Defense as a “spotlight teacher” and leading exemplar of the Troops to Teachers program. That same year he was selected for a member spotlight by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. Other honors include a Fulbright Teacher Exchange to Mexico, the Loretta Wollett Award for outstanding K-12 teaching and the Toyota International Education Award to Costa Rica.

Pulleiro holds a bachelor’s degree in Spanish Translation and Interpretation from Brigham Young University and two master’s degrees – in Educational Leadership from Boise State University and in Teacher Education from Eastern Oregon University.

He takes over the Idaho Teacher of the Year title from 2020 honoree Stacie Lawler, a Spirit Lake health and physical education teacher. Lawler attended the announcement to congratulate Pulleiro.

Idaho’s new Teacher of the Year said his message to fellow educators will focus on the importance of love and compassion in getting through to students.

“It is all about relationships,” he said in his application. “Drop any lesson plans and be there for those kiddos. Be there for them when sadness and tragedy come upon them. Believe in them and make sure they know you do. Laugh and cry with them. Let those students know that you too are human with problems and feelings.”

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**Attached:** A photo of Jorge Pulleiro, 2021 Idaho Teacher of the Year