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KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

K-Beach Elementary educator Heather Baker is one of four finalists to become 2023 Alaska Teacher of the Year!

Soldotna, May 20, 2022—The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development announced four teachers as finalists for the 2023 Teacher of the Year, including Heather Baker who teaches 4th grade at K-Beach Elementary School!

“It is truly an honor and a humbling experience to be a finalist for Alaska Teacher of the Year,” said Heather Baker. “To be nominated for the award means that I was successful in impacting a child’s learning journey in a profound enough way that someone took time to note it. That brings me true joy because that is why I am here every day. I want to positively impact the lives of the children who walk through my doors. I want them to see themselves as more than any label they feel attached to. I want them to see their successes and growth, to love this learning journey they are on and know that I am here to support and love them along the way. I am incredibly proud of the students in my room. This award highlights our learning journey together. It was their work that was highlighted in videos and samples that truly shined.”



Heather Baker is an outstanding teacher who is known for her student-centered and personalized approach to teaching students,” said Superintendent Clayton Holland. “Not only does Mrs. Baker have a positive impact with the students she works directly with, she has a huge impact as a teacher leader who works to expand effective educational practices as member of the district Champs Community of Practices.

Champs contribute to innovative practices across our entire district with reflection on success, and provides a support system for staff who are problem solving and innovating their instructional practices. Mrs. Baker is known for the support she provides and her strong work with student goal setting, data driven practices, and flexible student choice.”

K-Beach Elementary principal Janae Van Slyke said, “Heather Baker is an outstanding educator who designs her lessons and units using a student-centered approach. She creates an immersive learning environment focused on inquiry through interactive lessons. Mrs. Baker utilizes performance-based assessments and project-based learning rubrics to enhance student learning. She works collaboratively with her students to determine project design criteria and assessment, and she personalizes her instruction to meet the needs and interests of individual students. Mrs. Baker is an exceptional teacher and this honor is well deserved!”

KPBSD: ONE DISTRICT, FORTY-TWO DIVERSE SCHOOLS

The mission of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District is to empower all learners to positively shape their futures.
ANCHOR POINT COOPER LANDING HOMER HOPE KACHEMAK SELO KENAI MOOSE PASS NANWALEK NIKISKI NIKOLAEVSK NINILCHIK PORT GRAHAM
RAZDOLNA SELDOVIA SEWARD SOLDOTNA STERLING TUSTUMENA TYONEK VOZNESENKA

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In her words...

Tip: Fail Forward!

“My advice for a current student; fail forward. EVERYONE makes mistakes. Learn from each wrong answer or attempt because that is what true growth looks like. Be willing to take chances and try new things. In doing so you will grow. And know that if it is truly easy, then you already know it. True learning is hard because it is new and it stretches you. Do not be afraid of that process. Know that everyone goes through it.”

Math teacher who made a difference

“There is one experience and teacher who stands out in my own learning journey. Mr. Barrington was one of my high school math teachers. He noticed that my off task disruptive nature was actually boredom. He took time to give me multiple different placement tests and walked me through some different math theories to place me in the class I truly needed to be in rather than the one my grade



level dictated. In skipping several math classes, I was able to find a place where I was truly challenged and break the label I had been given of disruptive student. That experience shapes how I approach different learners within my own room.”

Delight

“I love having conversations with students and hearing them articulate their learning. Much of my classroom structure is small group or one on one meetings. Listening to students advocate for their learning and be active participants in designing their journey is the highlight of each day. Each pathway is unique to the individual, and I love that.”

Mom of seven, and a family that reads!

“I am a mom of seven, so my fun comes from watching each of them explore and enjoy the world. They are all incredibly different and unique people from the high schooler to the infant, so that is a very varied adventure. Something we all love doing though and often do together is read. We read to each other, listen to books at night or on drives, and talk about the books we've read. That is probably my greatest joy.”

Gratitude

“I am incredibly grateful for Amanda Adams and the CHAMPS Leadership Team. Amanda saw things in me and my classroom before I did. She encouraged me to step out of my classroom and become a teacher leader in the district. She encouraged me to take a role on the CHAMPS Leadership Team and that amazing group of educators has supported me in and out of the classroom. They have mentored and encouraged me while I step up to help mentor and encourage other educators.”

Alaska Department of Education and Early Development Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson said, “Alaska’s Teacher of the Year finalists have been recognized by their peers as deserving of special recognition. We join them in celebrating the dedication of these four educators and also as an opportunity to thank all Alaskan teachers for their hard work.”

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The Alaska Teacher of the Year and an alternate will be announced at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year. The selected teacher will serve as Alaska's nominee for the National Teacher of the Year and will be able to participate in programs and activities with other State Teachers of the Year coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers.

A teacher at K-Beach Elementary School in Soldotna since 2019, Mrs. Baker has also taught at Nikiski North Star Elementary, and worked as a Migrant Ed STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) teacher and tutor. She earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Political Science from the University of Washington and a Master of Arts (MA) in Education with Elementary focus from the University of Southern California.

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