



September 9, 2016

For Immediate Release

Contact: Mark Peterson, public relations director
801-538-7635 · mark.peterson@schools.utah.gov

West High AVID Teacher Named Utah Teacher of the Year

SALT LAKE CITY – Deputy State Superintendent of Public Instruction Rich K. Nye announced today that Salt Lake City School District West High School English language development and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher Valerie S. Gates has been named 2017 Utah Teacher of the Year.

Gates, of Salt Lake City, was presented with a check for \$10,000 and will compete with her fellow teachers of the year in a national competition. Gates will also receive a laptop computer from PC Laptops and a \$250 check from McDonald's. She will meet with fellow teachers of the year at a national conference, meet with the President in Washington, D.C., and attend space camp in Alabama next summer.

Jody Tolley, an American Sign Language teacher from Skyline High School in the Granite School District, was named first runner up and received a check for \$5,000. Gretchen Murray, a fourth grade gifted and talented teacher at Sandy's Peruvian Park Elementary in the Canyons School District, was named second runner up and received a check for \$3,000.

A committee with representatives from the Utah State Board of Education, school principals, school teachers and 2016 Utah Teacher of the Year Melody Apezteguia (ah-pestá-gee-ah) selected Gates from among local teachers of the year for the honor. All 20 local teachers of the year were honored at a banquet at the Double Tree Suites Hotel in Salt Lake City and presented with a gift from O.C. Tanner Company as well as a gift basket from Great Harvest Bread Company, a water filter backpack from All Filters, and a gift certificate from McDonald's. The University of Phoenix made a donation to help to offset the cost of the banquet.

"Valerie is always ready to help students become problem solvers, make thoughtful decisions, and become independent" wrote Eileen Hallet Stone of the Utah Section of the National Council of Jewish Women. "She speaks to students as if they are all partners in learning. And since she respects their ability to take on high expectations and extend their own ability to learn, they seem more willing to achieve."

"My teaching is driven by a powerful belief in human dignity and a basic mutual respect between teacher, student and family," Gates said. "This is an essential part of who I am and affects everything I do inside and outside of school."

Gates succeeds Apezteguia, who is a calculus teacher at American Fork High School in the Alpine School District.

www.schools.utah.gov