

## Alachua County Public Schools' Teacher of the Year finalists chosen

Three teachers have been chosen to represent all of Alachua County Public Schools' outstanding educators as finalists in the district's annual Teacher of the Year program.

Mackenzie McNickle, Amy Beres and Nicole Harris were selected by previous honorees of the Alachua County Teacher of the Year program to represent the district's elementary, middle and high schools this year. One of them will go on to represent Alachua County Public Schools in the Florida Teacher of the Year Program.

McNickle is in her ninth year as an elementary school math teacher. She currently teaches gifted 2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>-graders at Stephen Foster Elementary School. She's worked as an adjunct professor at the University of Florida, teaching early childhood math and science education to up-and-coming teachers. She's also made presentations on STEM education at local, state and national conferences.



McNickle says she didn't have great experiences as a math student herself, so helping her students love math is the best part of her job.

"I want my students to see math in the real world and understand how it applies to their everyday lives, how they can use it to solve real-world problems," she said. "These are skills they won't just use in the classroom, but for the rest of their lives."



Beres has been teaching music for 25 years. She's been a faculty member at Bishop since 2007, and has been the school's band director for more than ten years. She also spent more than ten years teaching music at Mebane Middle School. Her bands have consistently won superior and excellent ratings at state conferences, and many of her students are selected for all-state and all-county bands.

Beres says she wants to provide her students the same experience she got from being in a band.

"When I started in band in middle school, I finally felt I belonged, and I knew from that moment I wanted to be a band director," said Beres. "I wanted to give other kids a place that gave them purpose and meaning."

Harris has been teaching for eight years, all of them at Gainesville High School. She's taught English, English Honors and African/African-American History. She also piloted a writing course for non-traditional students in the Cambridge Program, a rigorous academic program affiliated with Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. Her success helped the school earn the Cambridge Small District of the Year Award in 2019.



Harris has also established programs outside the classroom to promote social awareness and expression among local students, such as the 'Canes on Da Mic Literacy Arts and Civic Engagement organization, which brings together students for 'poetry slam' competitions.

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Harris says she wants to foster a sense of global awareness among her students.

“It’s important for them to know there’s a bigger world out there and that we’re all connected,” said Harris. “When you understand the stories of other human beings, you’re more empathetic, and no one has to yell at you to be nice or help other people.”

This year’s teacher of the year honorees will now decide which of the finalists will be the districtwide Teacher of the Year. All honorees will be recognized at the 2021 Teacher of the Year Celebration, hosted by The Education Foundation. Due to COVID, the date and format of the celebration are still being developed.

All honorees will also receive a cash award and other gifts contributed by local businesses, civic organizations and other groups and individuals. To make a donation, go to <https://edfoundationac.org/>

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