



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Elliot Krieger, Communications - (401) 222-8471
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Beacon Charter science teacher named R.I. Teacher of the Year

A science teacher at the Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, in Woonsocket, was named tonight (September 19) as the 2013 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year.

Jessica Waters, 34, of Cumberland, who has taught at Beacon for the past four years, now becomes a candidate for the 2013 National Teacher of the Year, to be selected in April.

“Jessica Waters is a teacher who challenges her colleagues with provocative ideas and who is committed to bringing out the best in every one of her students,” said Governor Lincoln D. Chafee, who announced the selection. “She is a shining example for all Rhode Island educators, and she will represent our state well as she vies to become the National Teacher of the Year.”

“Within the past year, the students at the Beacon Charter School have doubled their proficiency level in science, a great tribute to the work of Jessica Waters and her colleagues,” said George D. Caruolo, Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “As one of her fellow teachers notes, Ms. Waters takes challenging material and makes it engaging. We are pleased to honor her as an outstanding Rhode Island educator.”

“In just her fifth year of teaching, Jessica Waters has earned the respect of her fellow teachers at Beacon and around the state,” said David V. Abbott, the Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “She is known not only for her innovative work as a science teacher but also for her dedication to the welfare of her students, in part through her role as the founder of the Beacon chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions. All of us at the R.I. Department of Education congratulate Jessica Waters on her selection as the 2013 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year.”

In her Teacher of the Year application, Ms. Waters recounts that she grew up in a home with parents who had drug-addiction problems and that she dropped out of school in the 10th grade. As she relates, she was distressed when a school counselor made no effort

Telephone 401-222-4600 **Fax** 401-222-6178 **TTY** 800-745-5555 **Voice** 800-745-6575

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to encourage her to stay in school. "I recall thinking that if I were a teacher I would have tried everything in my power to work with that student," Waters wrote. She later earned her GED and graduated from CCRI and from Rhode Island College, with a B.A. in secondary education. "I...decided I wanted to be that caring teacher who could make a difference in somebody's life," she wrote.

At Beacon, Waters prides herself on her "ability to inspire students of all backgrounds and learning abilities." Last year, she volunteered to have an education researcher observe her classes for 79 consecutive teaching days, and the researcher's findings will be published in a book, *Who's the New Kid in Chemistry?: Exploring Uncharted Waters*.

As one of her colleagues wrote of her: "Jessica frequently uses student reflective essays, online discussion boards, and exit surveys to poll her students on the teaching and learning in her classroom and to continuously improve her pedagogy." Her students "have a voice in creating assignments to tap student interest and promote student engagement." She maintains a website with resources to help students with their academic work, and, along with her colleagues at Beacon, she keeps a daily online curriculum diary so that teachers can share ideas and information across subject areas.

Beacon is an urban charter public high school, based in Woonsocket. Of the 230 students in the school, nearly half (48 percent) are economically disadvantaged and one of five (21 percent) are students with disabilities. Last year, student performance on the state assessment in science leaped from 14 percent proficient to 28 percent proficient, 3 percentage points above the state average.

As the advisor to Students Against Destructive Decisions at her school, Waters helps students prevent underage drinking, drug use, risky driving, and other dangerous behavior. "We meet once a week, and the turnout of students has been overwhelming," Waters wrote. "I know I'm making a difference – I'll never stop trying."

Governor Chafee announced the selection of the Teacher of the Year at "Celebrating Educator Excellence," an educator-recognition program that the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) held at the Orchard Farms Elementary School, in Cranston. The event also honored all Rhode Island District Teachers of the Year; the Superintendents, Principals, and Support Professionals of the Year; and other award winners, all of which have been announced previously. A complete list of those honored tonight will be posted tomorrow (Thursday), at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/Recognition/default.aspx>

Acting Commissioner Abbott also recognized and thanked the co-sponsors of the Teacher of the Year program, including Collette Vacations, Hasbro Inc., Johnson & Wales University, the Rhode Island Foundation, and SMART Technologies.

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