



# NEWS RELEASE

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## District's Teacher of the Year values the 'interconnectedness' of all things – in and out of the classroom

*Premier educators honored during CCS' annual Teacher and Beginning Teacher of the Year celebration event*

**Fayetteville, N.C.** – For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Cumberland County Schools (CCS) hosted an in-person celebration, themed *Together We Will Rise: A Teacher's Perspective*, to recognize the hard work and dedication of the district's teachers and beginning teachers. One highlight of the evening was the announcement of Talicia Smith, a science teacher at Douglas Byrd Middle School, as CCS' 2023 Teacher of the Year.

Smith believes that, in order to fully engage in the learning process, students must understand their value, purpose and impact on society. With a focus on social responsibility and collaboration, she says, "As a science teacher, I teach physical and life sciences, but there are many days that I teach about life and science."

CCS has a diverse community, and Smith makes a point to highlight various cultures and their contributions to society. She frequently has English as a Second Language (ESL) students in her classes and encourages them to share feedback in their native languages. Smith finds innovative ways to ensure that she, her students and her peers are able to understand each other and the world around them. Whether by using digital translation tools or pairing them with students who can interpret the instructions, she is committed to creating an equitable and inviting learning environment for every student.

"Every student is capable of success," said Smith. "They must only be shown the way and assisted as they learn, grow and make mistakes."

Smith understands that a school isn't just a building with books and desks. When she saw a shift in attitudes, beliefs and relationships impacting the school climate during the COVID-19 pandemic, she decided to be a positive force in helping her students and peers 'rise.' Smith made it a point to create a safe space for other teachers to discuss issues, brainstorm resolutions and

collaboratively develop lessons.

Smith started her teaching career with CCS in 2012 and has more than 16 years of teaching experience. She earned her master's in educational leadership in 2019 from Queens University in Charlotte.

As CCS' 2023 Teacher of the Year, Smith received:

- A trophy-award and flowers from CCS.
- \$300 from the Cumberland County Board of Education (CCBOE).
- \$500 from Olde Fayetteville Insurance and Financial Services, Inc.
- \$3,000 from LaFayette Ford-LaFayette Lincoln (\$1,000 for personal use and \$2,000 for use at her school).
- A commemorative custom-designed CCS' Teacher of the Year ring from Jostens.
- Two season passes to the Fayetteville Marksmen Hockey Games.
- A night's-stay at Embassy Suites-Fayetteville/Fort Bragg.

Other winners announced Monday night were first runner-up Patsy Beth Whittington from Hope Mills Middle School, who received a trophy-award and flowers from CCS, \$200 from the CCBOE and \$300 from Olde Fayetteville Insurance and Financial Services, Inc.; and second runner-up Shawna Kay Lawes from Ponderosa Elementary School, who received a trophy-award and flowers from CCS, \$100 from the CCBOE and \$200 from Olde Fayetteville Insurance and Financial Services, Inc.

The 10 Teacher of the Year Attendance Area finalists were awarded an iPad from CCS and \$100 from the CCBOE.

All of the district's Teacher of the Year candidates received \$100 and one hour of C.E.U. credit from CCS, a plaque-certificate from the CCBOE and a photo session and professional photos from Lifetouch photography.

As the county-wide winner, Smith will advance to compete for the regional title.

During the celebration, CCS also named Tonya McGill, a fourth-grade teacher from Morganton Road Elementary School, as the 2023 Beginning Teacher of the Year.

As CCS' 2023 Beginning Teacher of the Year, McGill received:

- A trophy-award from the CCBOE.
- Flowers and an iPad from CCS.
- \$200 from Olde Fayetteville Insurance and Financial Services, Inc.
- A \$100 gift card from School Tools.
- \$50 gift card to Luigi's Italian Chophouse & Bar.

McGill will go on to compete in the statewide North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT) 2022-2023 Beginning Teacher of the Year Award.

The 11 Beginning Teacher of the Year finalists received a plaque-certificate from the CCBOE, one CEU credit, dinner at Texas Roadhouse and \$100 from Olde Fayetteville Insurance and Financial Services, Inc.

“This evening, we were honored to recognize excellence in CCS as we announced our 2023 Teacher and Beginning Teacher of the Year,” said CCS Superintendent Dr. Marvin Connelly Jr. “Tonight’s celebration recognized how our teachers are dedicated to making certain that all children ‘rise’ academically despite the challenges. We are proud to support these premier professionals who are committed to the success of every student.”

CCS is thankful for the event's emcee WFNC 640 AM's Good Morning Fayetteville Host Jeff ‘Goldy’ Goldberg and the generous participation of event sponsors Olde Fayetteville Insurance & Financial Services, Inc. and LaFayette Ford-LaFayette Lincoln.



Talicia Smith  
CCS' 2023 Teacher of the Year



Tonya McGill  
CCS' 2023 Beginning Teacher of  
the Year

*Later this evening, photos from tonight's event will be [uploaded here](#).*

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