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*Mission Statement: We are committed to the success of every student!*

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### ***Finalists selected for Alachua County Teacher of the Year honors***

The three teachers selected as finalists in this year's Alachua County Teacher Recognition Program come from different backgrounds, but all share a passion for helping students develop skills and attitudes that will help them beyond the classroom.

Nicole Duncan, Todd Eckstein and Kendra Vincent were chosen from among the district's 39 teacher of the year honorees to represent elementary, middle and high school teachers in the districtwide program. One of them will go on to represent Alachua County Public Schools in the Florida Teacher of the Year program.

Nicole Duncan is a first-grade teacher at the Rawlings Center for Fine Arts. Originally from Jamaica, Duncan has worked as a teacher and parent educator/counselor teacher with Alachua County Public Schools and as a guidance counselor in Kingston, Jamaica. She's also volunteered her time with local churches and with the St. Francis House.

Duncan says she wants students to know that with hard work, they can master even those subjects that cause them to struggle. She says seeing children do just that is the best part of teaching.

"Those moments are unpredictable," she said. "You don't know when it's going to happen, but when it does happen, it's so good to see, and it's good to be a part of it."

Todd Eckstein is the director of music at Lincoln Middle School, where he's been on the faculty since 2007. He's been teaching music since 1998, and is active in state and local music and music education organizations. He's also performed and recorded professionally.

Many of Eckstein's students were not musicians until they started attending his class. Like Duncan, he wants his students to understand the value of trying, even if it sometimes means failing.

"They're learning a new skill, something they've never done before," he said. "In order to be successful, they have to be ready to fail, but approach it with a grateful heart, be excited about it and ready to try again and again and again."

*(more)*

Vincent is an English teacher at Buchholz High School. She's been teaching there since 2006. Her resume also includes time as a unit leader with the Girl Scouts of America and as an Americorps VISTA volunteer serving high-needs students in West Virginia. She's also volunteered as a child advocate with the local Guardian ad Litem program and as a tutor for the PACE Center for Girls.

Vincent says she wants to teach students to understand and enjoy books, but also much more.

"I really hope that I can broaden their horizons and that they get a larger sense of the world instead of just their own bubbles," she said. "I want them to realize they can make a difference in their community and the larger world."

Duncan, Eckstein, Vincent and their fellow honorees will all be recognized at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Robert W. Hughes Alachua County Teacher Recognition Program celebration, which will be held this Thursday, January 27 at 6:30 p.m. and is being hosted by The Education Foundation. The program is named after the former Alachua County Public Schools superintendent who established the program.

All honorees will receive a cash award and gifts donated by local businesses and individuals, including primary sponsors Cox, Florida Credit Union, North Florida Regional Medical Center and SWI Photographers. The overall district Teacher of the Year will be announced at the end of the celebration.

The event will be live streamed at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=eW2H0Jj7YxM&feature=youtu.be>

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***Note to media: Although this event is invitation-only due to COVID, the media are welcome to attend in person. It will be held at Trinity United Methodist Church at 4000 NW 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Doors will open at 6. Masks are required.***