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NEWS RELEASE

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Middle school music teacher named Alachua County's 2022 Teacher of the Year

A veteran music teacher has been named the 2022 Alachua County Public Schools' Teacher of the Year.

Todd Eckstein, the director of instrumental music at Lincoln Middle School, was announced as the district's newest top teacher at Thursday evening's Robert W. Hughes Teacher Recognition celebration. He will now go on to represent Alachua County Public Schools in the Florida Teacher of the Year program.

Eckstein has been teaching music to middle and high school students since 1998, and has been at Lincoln for the last 15 years. Under his direction, bands and ensembles have earned state and national recognition and top ratings in performance assessments. They've also performed at many local and state events. More than 30 of his students have qualified for All State bands and orchestras.

Eckstein is a talented musician in his own right, having performed and recorded professionally. He says he wants students to experience 'musical joy' in their own ways.

"Participating in music has the ability to engage students in ways that are wholly unique to the human experience," he said. "Music can profoundly impact a person and I hope to share the start of that journey with my students."

One of Eckstein's students, 8th-grader Miles Smith, paid tribute to him at the recognition program

"I always look forward to his class," said Smith. "He's made my middle school experience so much more enjoyable, even during the pandemic."

During his speech at the celebration, Eckstein said teachers have a responsibility to provide students with the passion and skills to engage with the wider community.

"I do that through music, to spark something creative, a side of a young person that they didn't know that they had inside of them," he said.

Eckstein was one of three teachers chosen as finalists in this year's recognition program, who were in turn among 39 ACPS teachers nominated by their schools. The other finalists included Nicole Duncan, a first-grade teacher at Rawlings Center for the Fine Arts, and Kendra Vincent, an English teacher at Buchholz High School. All three spoke at the event and were introduced by current or former students.

This was the recognition program's 30th anniversary. In attendance at the celebration was Robert Hughes, who established the program and after whom it is named. The event was hosted by The Education Foundation and sponsored by a wide variety of individuals, businesses and organizations, including primary sponsors Cox, Florida Credit Union, North Florida Regional Medical Center and SWI Photographers. Each of the school nominees received a \$500 cash award and a bag of 'goodies' provided by sponsors.

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