

Metcalfe Elementary music teacher is Alachua County's Teacher of the Year

"Music matters, and you matter!"

That's the way music teacher Dwynette Smith ends each of her classes at Metcalfe Elementary School. It's also the basis of her philosophy as a music teacher.



"I love teaching music, and I want to instill that love of music in my students," said Smith. "I try to make sure they know they can come to music class and be respected, treasured, and praised, all while learning new skills and being exposed to a varied and rich musical landscape."

Smith, who has been teaching music for more than twenty years, was just named Alachua County's 2024 Teacher of the Year and will go on to represent the district in the Florida Teacher of the Year program.

Smith's selection was announced at the annual Robert W. Hughes Teacher of the Year ceremony, held January 25. Thirty-nine teacher honorees selected from each of the district's schools were recognized, including Smith, middle school finalist Sarah Rendek from High Springs Community School and high school finalist Jenifer Knowles from the Professional Academies Magnet @ Loften High School.

During her remarks at the ceremony, Smith shared that while she was in elementary school, her family went through tough times. School, she said, was her refuge. It was her teachers who gave her the encouragement she needed to excel, and her music teacher who inspired her to teach music.

"As I grew, I knew that I wanted to learn as much about music as I could," she said. "But that all started in a classroom with a teacher who loved what she taught and showed it. That feeling of being cared for and encouraged is what I try to impart to my students in music class."

Each of the teacher honorees received an award of \$500 thanks to donations from local businesses, organizations and individuals. The annual Teacher of the Year event is hosted and organized by The Education Foundation for Alachua County Public Schools. This year's primary sponsors were Cox Communications, Florida Credit Union and SWI Photographers.

"We are proud to support teachers through the work of the Foundation," said The Education Foundation's Executive Director Jayne Moraski. "I'm amazed at the innovative ideas our teachers have to engage their students and the way they genuinely care about and know each one of their students."

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