

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, Oct. 13, 2022

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Cassels selected as 2023 South Dakota Teacher of the Year

FORT PIERRE, S.D. – Alyssa Cassels, the 5-12 band director in the Deuel School District, has been named the 2023 South Dakota Teacher of the Year. Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson made the announcement this evening at a banquet at the Drifters Event Center in Fort Pierre.

“Alyssa is a proud homegrown teacher,” said Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson. “Over this coming year she will serve as an advocate for teachers and students across South Dakota. Hearing her story about returning to teach in the school district she grew up in is inspiring and will spark interest in our next generation of educators.”

Cassels has taught in the Deuel School District since 2016 and has grown the band program throughout that time. In 2020, she launched a middle school drum line. Her bands have received Superior ratings at contests, first and second places at marching events, and the pep band was selected as a Tournament Band of the Day in March 2022. Cassels strives to instill a sense of personal responsibility in her students and uses community engagement to promote school pride and enthusiasm about the band program.

A statewide panel of educators selected Cassels from among five regional finalists. The other finalists were Deb Jensen, kindergarten, Viborg-Hurley School District; Loretta Knodel, third grade, Avon School District; Jennifer Weishaar, first grade, Aberdeen School District; and Jennifer Macziewski, first grade, Rapid City Area Schools.

As recipient of the honor, Cassels receives prizes including a \$5,000 grant from the West River Foundation and a \$2,000 honorarium from the South Dakota Board of Regents to present a series of professional development seminars to aspiring teachers. Prize packages are made possible through the generosity of private businesses and organizations, including the South Dakota Retailers Association and the South Dakota Education Association.

In addition, Cassels will represent South Dakota as a candidate for the National Teacher of the Year award. The National Teacher of the Year Program began in 1952 and continues as the oldest, most prestigious national honors program that focuses public attention on excellence in teaching. The 2023 National Teacher of the Year will be announced during a ceremony in Washington, D.C., in the spring.

