

CELEBRATING

# South Dakota

TEACHERS  
2016



**On the cover**

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**2016 session sees passage of historic education package**

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On March 11, 2016, Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed the components of his education proposal – House Bill 1182, Senate Bill 131 and Senate Bill 133 – into law. This K-12 education package aims to increase the statewide average teacher salary, and recruit and retain high quality teachers in the state.

"I thank legislators for partnering with me to pass this historic package of legislation. Thanks to their support, South Dakota will no longer be in last place for teacher pay and we will be able to better compete with our surrounding states," said Gov. Daugaard. "This is going to make all the difference for our students whose achievement depends upon a good workforce of teachers."



## Learning in progress



South Dakota Teacher of the Year Sarah Lutz remembers being timid in some of her high school math classes. "If I didn't understand something, I wouldn't raise my hand," Lutz says. "I would try to figure it out on my own, even if I didn't necessarily know what I was doing."

In Lutz's 3rd grade classroom in the Stanley County School District, she wants students to feel safe and know it's okay to make mistakes. Her classroom is based upon a "school family" model of expectations and procedures.

At the beginning of the year, Lutz surveys students to gauge their interests and spends time getting to know them through one-on-one and small group opportunities, like the glitter ball game. In this game, students throw three different-sized balls to each other in a certain pattern, with the goal of not dropping any

of them. "This activity builds trust and cooperation and establishes the importance of a team," she says. "It takes practice and encouraging words from all team members."

Students also read books about how to treat each other and role-play different scenarios about how to talk to each other and be respectful.

"Thank You, Mr. Falker" is a popular picture book with Lutz's students. It's about a student who is embarrassed by her poor reading skills until her 6th grade teacher Mr. Falker really takes the time to work with her and help her improve. At the end of the story, the narrator writes about running into Mr. Falker years later at a wedding. When he asks her what she does for a living, she tells him she has become a children's book writer. The story is based on the life of its author, Patricia Polacco.

"Some of my kids have said, 'That reminds me of me,'" Lutz says. "Third graders can recognize when a skill or concept is hard for them. Reading stories like this creates a personal connection with the text. The goal is for students to understand everyone learns in a different way, and it's okay to make a mistake. The students learn from each other, become risk takers and connect with those important lessons from our picture books."

Lutz displays inspirational quotes throughout her classroom to reinforce these lessons.

"And this is extremely important in the beginning of the year," Lutz says, picking up a hand puppet named Shubert, from Dr. Becky Bailey's Conscious Discipline classroom management program. "He's our little classroom mascot. It's about building relationships, building trust. So when we do our lessons, we have a little song we sometimes start with: *I take risks / I make mistakes / So I can learn to be successful.*"



## South Dakota Teacher of the Year Program

The Teacher of the Year Program honors the contributions of outstanding classroom teachers across the country. Each year, school districts in South Dakota select their own Teacher of the Year. From this pool, six regional candidates are selected, and from this group comes the South Dakota Teacher of the Year. The South Dakota Teacher of the Year goes on to represent the state in the national competition and enjoys several opportunities to travel and engage in professional development activities with peers from across the country.



Sarah Lutz snapped a selfie with Vice President Joe Biden when State Teachers of the Year gathered in Washington, D.C.



## Connecting with students through customized learning



Kim Davidson teaches 7-12 English in Rosholt. In 2015, though, she found a little piece of heaven in Harrisburg. *This is it!* she thought. “When I went there, I thought, this is finally a system for everything I’ve ever believed in my 27 years of teaching,” Davidson says.

So what was it she found? Customized learning.

She started on the path to customized learning when she attended a session on the topic, led by Harrisburg High School Principal Dr. Kevin Lein at the Systems Change Conference in October 2015.

After visiting Harrisburg with several colleagues, she spent Christmas break making plans to start implementing the concept in her 9th grade English class and began with the third quarter.

“I’m working with an online program called Blackboard, so I post things there, and the students can all go in and there’s a folder for each unit,” Davidson says.

Now class periods consist of students working independently and one-on-one with Davidson as she checks in on their progress. She might discuss a novel with one student to see if he’s ready for a quiz, work on vocabulary with another, and coach someone else on choosing a research topic. By the end of third quarter, all students were ready for, and some were already starting, fourth quarter work.

Davidson has learned a lot about her students through this process. While discussing a novel, she says one student made a deeply personal observation about the story: “I’m quite sure that student would not have brought that up in a larger class discussion, so it was very powerful to hear.”

This process has also put Davidson in touch with her content standards in a new way: “Everything I put on Blackboard for the students starts with what standards they’re meeting. So they can see, this is the standard they need to master. I show them very clearly, this is why we’re doing a particular activity.”

One thing Davidson didn’t expect was the fresh look she got at how students study vocabulary. “I never would have worked with students

### Keys to customized learning:



- Meet learners at their learning level.
- Allow them to learn in their natural learning style.
- Allow them to learn using content of interest.

From the book “Inevitable” by Charles Schwahn & Beatrice McGarvey

## More schools seek to customize the student experience

A number of schools across South Dakota are utilizing customized learning to some degree. Here are some thoughts from the field:

In Harrisburg, customized learning has created higher expectations, accountability and greater student ownership. It is a true reflection of students’ potential realized. Students develop a strong work ethic and cultivate their time management skills. They realize they have a voice and choice on their path to success.

– Dr. Kevin Lein, principal, Harrisburg High School

For teachers, it’s a lot of work to transition from a traditional classroom to a customized learning environment, but the teacher gains more one-on-one time with students and builds a close working relationship with each student. In my experience, teachers who fully commit to customized learning, say they would never go back to a traditional classroom.

– Brad Seamer, principal, McCook Central High School

individually on vocabulary words before,” she says.

But upon closer observation of how her students learn, Davidson has found a loophole: “Some students are just seeing, oh this word ends in *-ble* and this definition has a word that ends in *-ble*, so this must be the right answer,” she says. “So they’re getting the right answer, but they don’t really understand the meaning of that vocabulary word. I’m not quite sure yet how to address this, but I know I need to do something.”

# HEIDI HOLFORTY



## Learning is all fun and games

"Hatschi Patschi!" yells one of Heidi Holforty's students. Controlled chaos ensues as a group of high schoolers suddenly scrambles to secure seats in a modified version of musical chairs.

Holforty teaches 9-12 German in the Huron School District. She does it for the excitement, taking any opportunity to get kids up playing games or otherwise working cooperatively.

The Huron School District has South Dakota's second largest student population of English language learners, and Holforty says the training opportunities within the district have been abundant: "Huron has done such a nice job of teaching our teachers the best strategies to use,

and I think those strategies help all students, not only English language learners."

Recently, Holforty earned her English as a New Language endorsement, not because she necessarily intends to become an English as a Second Language teacher, but because she finds the skills useful for her German classes, too. "I like to call it 'GSL,'" she says. "German as a Second Language."

Holforty tries to use a lot of pictures, videos and actions to make the words she's teaching come alive. Getting students speaking the language to each other and discussing it is also important.

In one activity, Holforty counts students off into small groups, numbering them 1, 2, 3 or 4. Groups translate to German a sentence she says in English; for example, *The girl is happy*. Students work to come to consensus because after a set amount of time, Holforty uses a spinner to choose a number. Students with that number then go to the board and write down their group's answer.

There are lots of laughs to be had in Holforty's classroom, but there's a serious reason behind it. "I love to see kids happy and smiling," she says. "That's the part of my job I love the most, just bringing them happiness and getting them excited for school. We have to be positive for the kids, because some of them have a lot of negative things going on in their lives."

What Holforty is doing must be working, based on some heartfelt messages she has received from students: "...You have the most fun aura about you...I haven't told you before but every time I felt sad and walked into your classroom it made me forget about EVERYTHING that is troubling me. I want to thank you for that."

Another student writes, "...Even when I'm having down days, that's the class that gets me up again. Your class and your attitude towards trying to get me to learn, just make every day like Freitag! Thank you very much, Frau Holforty!"

## What on earth is Hatschi Patschi?

It's one of the most frequently requested games in Heidi Holforty's German class. She uses it for review. Here's how it works:

- 1) Holforty sends one student to the hallway.
- 2) Remaining students sit in a circle of chairs and close their eyes.
- 3) Holforty taps one student on the head, designating him or her, Hatschi Patschi.
- 4) The student returns from the hallway and begins walking around the circle, asking students, one-by-one, a question in German – for example, *Wie geht's dir?* (How are you?).
- 5) Students respond in German: *Gut* (good), *Sehr gut* (very good), *Schlecht* (bad) and so forth. When the student designated Hatschi Patschi is asked, *Wie geht's dir?* he or she responds, *Hatschi Patschi!* and the race for a chair is on.



# SHELLY MIKKELSON



## Collaboration is key

The kids aren't the only ones learning in Shelly Mikkelson's 2nd grade classroom. For all 13 years Mikkelson has taught 2nd grade in Belle Fourche, she has had a student teacher.

The student teaching experience is very hands-on in Mikkelson's classroom. She enjoys working with the young educators and tries to approach it more like a team teaching opportunity. "I just kind of look at it as, I'm the guide on the side, and they can try whatever they would like, to a certain extent," she says.

Student teachers are also instructive for Mikkelson. One way she stays on top of the

latest in educational research and trends is by keeping abreast of what classes they're taking and what books they're reading.

Those first years of teaching can be intimidating. Mikkelson remembers the feeling vividly and compares it to a fish swimming upstream. It's a struggle she seeks to ease for new and future teachers.

Mikkelson encourages early-career educators to take their time: "Remember that everything doesn't have to be done your first year. Take baby steps and continue learning—read professional literature or take more college

classes. Write reflection notes about what you should do again or what didn't work so well."

It's also important to have fun, Mikkelson says: "Everyone makes mistakes. Admit your mistakes. But also remember to smile and laugh and have fun with the kids."

One common issue for new teachers, Mikkelson notes, is classroom management. In this area, she knows it can be tough to determine what's acceptable and what to do when a child acts out. Her suggestion? "Find the positives, and pick your battles," she says. "Oftentimes students like to be a help to you in some way, so praise the kids who are doing what's asked."

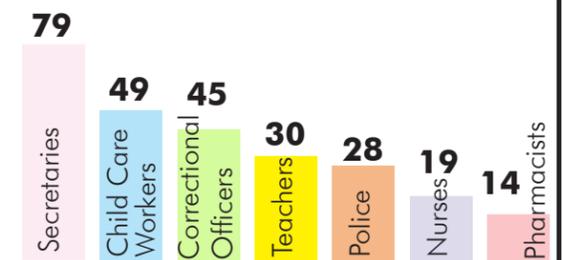
And what are some of those battles not worth fighting? Mikkelson recommends keeping the big picture in mind: "Sometimes it's like, being out of their seat. They'd just rather stand. Kind of step back and take a look—is it impeding the learning of others or is it just something that you can look past?"

Supporting not only new and future teachers, but experienced colleagues is a high priority for Mikkelson, and she says it's a practice fostered by the school district's administrators: "I feel Belle Fourche has a lot of professional development. Teachers in our school also regularly work together in vertical teams.

## Did you know?

Senate Bill 133, which was part of the 2016 education package, includes a \$1.2 million appropriation in ongoing funds for the purpose of establishing a teacher mentoring program in South Dakota. This program will pair experienced, trained mentors with first- and second-year teachers. A new teacher summer academy will also be developed.

### Percent attrition in teaching vs. other occupations



Source: Ingersoll, R. & Perda, D. forthcoming. *How High is Teacher Turnover and is it a Problem?* Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania



As a 2nd grade teacher, I try to collaborate with 1st and 3rd grade teachers. We sometimes record lessons, too, and then trade videos, so we can watch each other teach. We're given the opportunity to visit each other's classrooms to observe how other teachers do things as well."



## Teaching all the time

Kaye Wickard is the Title reading teacher and Response to Intervention, or RtI, coordinator for the Ipswich School District. All day long, small groups of elementary students (4th graders, then kindergarteners, 1st grade, 3rd grade, next 2nd grade and finally, 5th) come into her classroom at 25-minute intervals. She sets alarms on her phone to keep everyone moving on time.

Wickard delights in the work. She says it was nature and nurture that led her to the profession. Her mother and aunts were teachers. When she was very little, she taught lessons to her dolls and animals on the family farm. In elementary school, she took part in a program where 6th graders helped in the kindergarten classroom. As a teenager, she taught Bible school, managing a room full of 25 kindergarteners. She also belonged to the Future Teachers of America organization at Watertown High School.

When asked what advice she would offer someone considering a career in teaching, her answer reflects her experience. "I would tell them to spend as much time as possible in a school, in a classroom, participating in as many teaching-related activities as possible to be certain that is the path they want to go," she says. "Being a teacher is a challenging job. It isn't for everyone, but if it is for you, it will be very rewarding."

Even now, Wickard takes her own advice—seeking out every teaching-related activity she can. Her day neither starts nor ends in her classroom. Before

**RtI model**

**Tier III: Intensive interventions**

**Tier II: Strategic interventions**

**Tier I: All students**

and after school, as the district's National Honor Society advisor, she can be found supervising the Tiger Paw Tutoring Program.

"A few years ago, administrators asked if the NHS students would consider tutoring other students," Wickard says. "NHS students are to exemplify scholarship, leadership, character and service, so in 2011, our tutoring program became our service project."

The program continues to expand and has proven popular with students, parents and educators. Community members and organizations have even gotten involved by pitching in to help with after-school snacks.

*Have you seen my new friend?* Wickard recalls a little boy asking her one day. "He was talking about an NHS student who had worked with him as part of the tutoring program," she says. "In hallways and at school events, he always looked for that NHS student. The relationships

the high schoolers create with the younger students are a great plus of the program."

As a reward for all their hard work, every two years, Wickard takes NHS students on an educational adventure, a whirlwind five-day tour of Washington, D.C., and New York City, featuring memorials, museums, a Broadway show and more.

To raise money for the trip, Wickard and her NHS students have built what she lightheartedly describes as "quite a pretzel business," selling big soft pretzels with various dipping sauces at home volleyball and basketball games.





## Making music connections: 'My mom and dad know the Beatles!'

You're driving down the road when your favorite song comes on the radio. What happens? Do you start tapping your fingers on the steering wheel? Do you sing along? Maybe you even sway back and forth a bit. Whatever you do, it's the result of a connection—your connection to that music.

Leslie Fyelling teaches K-4 music in the Tea Area School District. She has taught in the area for more than 30 years, and her main goal is to help students make powerful musical connections.

Those connections can be mechanical, like finding the beat of a song. "If you hear a steady beat, you can tap your feet," Fyelling tells students in a sing-song voice. She encourages children to move whenever possible—clapping hands with a partner, marching around the classroom or tapping their heads, shoulders and desks.

Every month, Fyelling's students study a different composer, and one of their favorite activities is a game she invented, called "Hide and Seek with Haydn." Fyelling assigns students one of three roles: Mama Haydn, Papa Haydn or Franz Joseph Haydn. First, the Mamas sing, *Joseph Haydn, where are you?* The Josephs reply, *Playing hide and seek, Mama.* When the papas sing, *Franz Joseph Haydn, you come here,* the Josephs respond, *Coming right away, Papa.*

The back story Fyelling tells students for the game is that little Franz Joseph is in trouble with Papa Haydn because he hasn't done his chores. She says students can identify with the situation and really enjoy taking turns with the different roles. The game also incorporates a touch of German, since it's the primary language spoken in Haydn's native Austria. Students learn that the "J" at the beginning of Joseph's name is pronounced like a "y." And the tune of the song gets students using *so, mi* and *la*.

In addition to classical composers like Haydn, Fyelling features modern composers and musicians like George Gershwin, Rodgers and Hammerstein, John Williams, even the Beatles and Pharrell Williams.

Students love to tell Fyelling when they hear music they've studied in class, outside the school setting: *My mom and dad know the Beatles! I heard Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy on my*

*grandma's music box! My dad's ringtone is Eine kleine Nachtmusik!*

Think again of your favorite song. As you dance or sing along, it goes beyond the mechanics of beat, dynamics, tempo and tune. It probably makes you think of a certain time or place in your life.

Fyelling also wants her students to make that kind of connection with music: "I hope they develop the sense that music can be an expression of joy and energy and creativity. It can also express sorrow and sadness and peace. I have a poster that kind of sums it up. It says, *Caution! Exposure to music may cause sudden outbursts of joy, happiness, energy, creativity, awareness and spontaneous healing.* If I can be part of that nurturing and fostering a love of music for students at this young age, oh boy, I feel like I've done my job."



# GINA BENZ

## Above all, listen

Perhaps the greatest gift one person can give another is simply to listen. That's the lesson Gina Benz most wants to impart to her students.

Benz has been teaching English at Roosevelt High School in Sioux Falls for 16 years. She has taught the full spectrum of achievement

levels—special education students, English language learners and Advanced Placement students. No matter the class, everyone has a story to tell.

"I became an English teacher because I believe in the power of people's stories," Benz says. "I believe in the power of helping others share their own stories and the power of learning from others' stories."

Students are encouraged to read their writing aloud in Benz's classes. "Of course it takes some prep work to create an atmosphere where students feel safe to share their work and where students respond in a kind manner to their peers," she says. She helps to encourage sharing by arranging student desks in a horseshoe shape, sitting in one herself, positioned at the open end, to indicate class is an open conversation.

Listening can take many forms, and it doesn't always require one's ears. When students leave Benz's class, she also wants them to know how to read deeply, closely examining not only what an author is saying, but their own personal reaction to the text.

"Every year, without fail, some students will ask, *Aren't we reading too much into this?*" Benz says. "And my response is always this: We aren't on a treasure hunt for what authors were hoping we might get out of their text. The analysis of text is about the author's intentions but even more so about our own responses. If it's meaningful to you, then it's worthy of discussion."

For the past five years, Benz has secured grant money to buy students their own copies of classic literature, like "The Great Gatsby" and "The Scarlet Letter." She says, "That is my #1 tool for helping them analyze a text deeply—getting them interacting with the text with a pen in hand and writing in that book, essentially saying, *I was here. I did this. I read this. I thought about this.*"

## Milken Educator

In October 2015, Gina Benz received the Milken Educator Award, a \$25,000 prize. *Teacher magazine* calls the "Oscar™ of Teaching."



The award is meant to recognize the importance of outstanding educators and encourage talented young people to enter the teaching profession.





## Making students feel at home in the library

The Douglas High School Library in Box Elder is a busy place. Librarian Kim Darata

works hard to encourage students to read for pleasure and to enjoy their library space.

### How are today's school libraries different from when you were in school?

I think they're used a lot more than when I was in school, and I think that has a lot to do with the technology we have today that our students need. We have a room of 35 computers within our

library. We also provide cameras and iPads for students to check out. I also think librarians are making changes in the environment of libraries to make them more welcoming places and more "teen-centric," so it doesn't look like it was built or decorated for adults.

### How do you make the library "teen-centric"?

We have a couple different lounge areas, and we have some beanbag chairs, rugs, posters, lamps. Around August, I start looking at store ads, because that's when they're advertising for dorm decorations. So that's the best time to find things I think our students will like in their space.



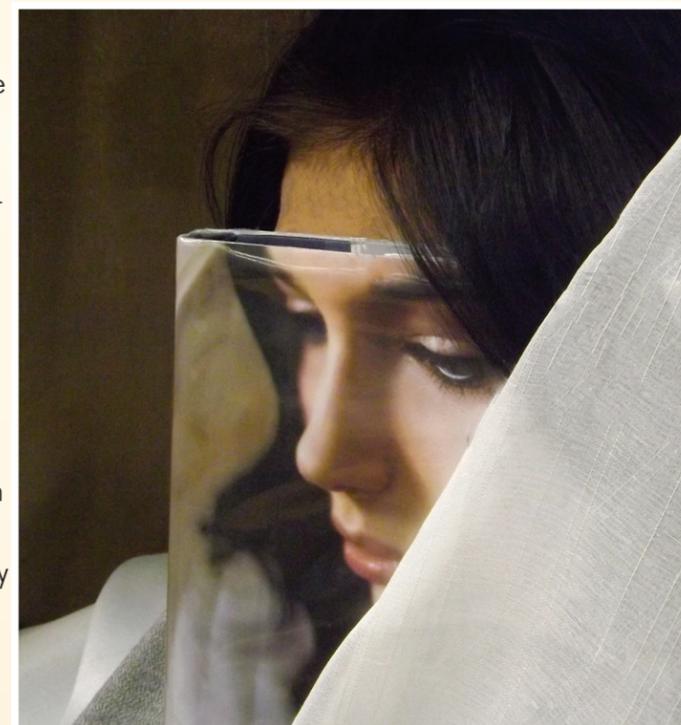
### What kind of social events do you hold in the library?

I advise a student book club, and they run our Library Cafe every Monday and Friday morning. They make coffee, hot chocolate and tea. We have fruit and cereal bars. And one non-breakfast item is very popular—the popcorn. It's nice for the book club students to get together, and our other students enjoy the cafe as well.

### What are some unique ways you collaborate with teachers on student projects?

For the past few years, I've worked with our photography teacher on a project called Book Face. Students choose a book that has either a face or a person on the cover and they must then incorporate that cover into a portrait of themselves or a model they choose.

A few years ago, I also started working with some of our English teachers on Book Spine Poetry. Their students come in and create poems by stacking books that have words on the spines. We take pictures of those poems; then students and staff get the opportunity to vote on their favorites, and we award prizes.



The Douglas High School Library is recognized by the South Dakota State Library as an Exemplary 21st Century School Library.

### When it comes to research, how do you help students identify reliable resources?

We discuss what to look for in a resource and the fact that our State Library provides these research databases that are maintained by authoritative publishers who do this work professionally—providing us with quality information.

Our middle school librarian teaches about those databases too, so I explain that the databases for the high school level and beyond look a little different from the ones they used when they were younger, but that they all basically work the same way. Once they've learned how to use one, they can learn to navigate others.

And if they choose to use something from websites and so forth, we talk about how to evaluate those sources so they can still get quality information.

# LINDSEY BREWER

## Sheltering students to help them go far



Lindsey Brewer, a math teacher at Huron High School, received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching in 2015. In the 2015-16 school year, Brewer taught pre-calculus, statistics, trigonometry and sheltered pre-algebra for English language learners. She has worked with Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) for about five years. She is also one of the district's SIOP coaches.



The Huron School District has the second largest ELL population in South Dakota. Many students in Brewer's sheltered classes speak Karen and have only been in the United States for a few years. If you studied a foreign language in high school, imagine if you had also been required to take algebra in that language.

"Their social English might be great—when they're having lunch, hanging out with friends and casual settings like that," Brewer says. "Academic vocabulary is what they need to work on. The goal is to increase language skills as you teach core content. I have to get students speaking a lot."

### Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching



The Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching is the nation's highest honor for math and science teachers. Every year, up to 108 awardees receive a \$10,000 award and a trip to Washington, D.C., for networking opportunities and recognition events.

Talking about math helps ELLs and native English speakers alike, so in all of her classes, Brewer has students use the big white boards hanging around her room to show and explain their work. At the beginning of the year, they work in small groups, then with partners. By the end of the year, students explain their thinking individually, in front of the whole class. "When they have to explain the process to me or their classmates, it helps them learn better," Brewer says.

In recent years, Brewer has been sharing her own learning by working with fellow Huron High School math teacher Lori Keleher to deliver presentations on activities they use in their classrooms. Keleher nominated Brewer for the Presidential Award. The two of them have spoken at the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics annual meeting in Boston as well as the TIE Conference here in South Dakota.

Brewer and Keleher have also developed a day-long workshop which focuses on transforming worksheets into engaging activities and games.



One way Brewer likes to engage students is with manipulatives. She says her students' favorites are the ones they can eat. She has had geometry students in a sheltered class represent lines with pretzels, points with M&Ms and arrows with candy corn. For pre-calculus students, even carbon dating can be delicious. As carbon is depleted, it's replaced by nitrogen. What yummier way to illustrate this phenomenon than with M&M carbon and Reese's Pieces nitrogen?



# JANET WAGNER



## A homegrown teacher, growing young thinkers

Janet Wagner is a middle and high school science teacher in the Bon Homme School District. In 2015, she received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

Wagner and her husband Ron are also emergency medical technicians. They both grew up in the Tyndall area, and she says, "When we get a street address, we can often say who used to live there. It helps if the 911 dispatcher is from the area, too." Just about anyone who grew up in a small town can identify with this phenomenon:

*11111 555th Street. Let's see, it's just south of Norwegian Hill, where Mr. Johnson used to live.*

*We're on our way!*

An emergency call starts with an address. Without context, though, it's just numbers. Of course EMTs also use maps to get where they need to go, but a built-in mental map is faster than any Google search. And it goes without saying that EMTs don't have time to wait for their smartphones to load the results of an internet search for "how to stabilize a crash victim."



Wagner wants her students to develop this kind of skill—not necessarily the ability to know who lived in that white farmhouse on the edge of town 30 years ago—but the ability to reason through a problem without relying too heavily on technology.

"The most important thing we can teach students is the ability to think. Too often they rely on computers for superficial answers," Wagner says. "I want students to apply what they learn. For instance, my 8th grade earth science students were building wind turbine blades. I have no problem with them going online to research how many blades to use, what width and length. But then they have to do something with that information. They have to build the blades to learn for themselves what works best."

Beyond that, Wagner wants students to learn how to communicate and present an argument. "We're studying renewable energy in 8th grade right now. We have one wind farm in the area already and may have another in the future. Are

they in favor of another wind farm, and why?" she asks. "They need to learn to gather data and analyze it. Some of these students may end up with jobs working on those turbines. These topics matter to their lives."

After 42 years of teaching, Wagner retired at the end of the 2015-16 school year. "It's icing on the cake, because it's my final year of teaching," she says of earning the PAEMST. "There's no higher honor than a Presidential Award."



# SUSAN SCHMIT

## Special education a team effort in Clark



In 2015, special education teacher Susan Schmit and student Michael Bethke accepted the Governor's Award for Outstanding Transition Services on behalf of the Clark School District. "It was a huge treat," Schmit says of the award. "And it's significant that it was awarded to the school district because of how caring our entire district is."

Jessica Fischer, senior rehabilitation counselor with the Division of Rehabilitation Services in Watertown, nominated the school district: "I nominated the Clark School District because of the exceptional service they provide for students who have disabilities. They go above and beyond to help students reach their goals and be as independent as possible while individualizing each student's IEP. They provide services to

assist the students in learning both independent living skills as well as employment skills, so they are ready for the real world of work after high school. I most appreciate the teamwork approach and collaboration the school has with outside agencies to provide the best quality of services for each student."

### Transition about more than academics

Over the course of her career, Schmit has seen transition services expand to include more than academic planning: "If students have adult living goals—obtaining a driver's license, registering to vote and so forth—those things can go on their IEP. Transition is about their whole life, not just their academic life."

Special education students have many of the same aspirations as their peers in general education. They simply require different kinds of support sometimes. "Once my students turn 16, we start doing quite a bit of assessment," Schmit says. "We talk about their work preferences, likes and dislikes, and go from there to find a career that could fit. Some students require quite a bit of help; others very little."

### Business community an active partner

The Clark School District works with businesses in the community through Project Skills, a program administered through the South Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services.

"Our business community has been very supportive of Project Skills. Students work in the summer and start with four hours a day. One of our teacher aides, Sherry Swanson, stays with students on the job as long as they need help," Schmit says. "As they're able to work more independently,

Sherry pulls back and monitors through phone calls or whatever the situation calls for. Sometimes this program leads to permanent jobs for students. The employers provide valuable experience for our students. They've been great to us."

### Life lessons in the classroom

In the classroom, reading comprehension is one of Schmit's highest priorities for her students. "I'm always working to increase their reading levels. They're going to have to read in all areas of their life," she says. "We also work on consumer math skills, in addition to algebra and geometry, so they understand consumer vocabulary and practical math they'll use in the real world with checking accounts and that sort of thing," Schmit says.

Schmit also commends her colleagues Tammie Paulson and Greg Janisch who teach career and technical education courses in family and consumer sciences and agriculture. "Students can use the skills learned in those classes all their lives," she says.

### Governor's Award for Outstanding Transition Services



The Governor's Award for Outstanding Transition Services is given to an individual or organization (public or private) in recognition of extraordinary contributions to providing and developing a transition program to assist students with disabilities as they transition from school to the adult system.





## How many ways can students use this?

South Dakota's 2015 Career and Technical Education Teacher of the Year Joe Dalton is an explorer. A graduate of Lake Area Technical Institute, he was a maintenance operator for the City of Watertown for 12 years. As his family grew, he frequently found himself volunteer coaching and discovered he liked working with kids. Curious and ready for a change, he took a couple education classes at the local Mount Marty campus.

Dalton had found his new frontier: teaching. He eventually took a job with Northeast Technical High School, a multidistrict school in Watertown. And to call it a 'frontier' is no exaggeration. The exploratory CTE program he was to lead didn't yet exist. "We teach 16 career clusters at Northeast," Dalton says. "School administrators gave me a sheet of paper with one idea behind each cluster and said, 'After that, you can come up with what you want.'"

That was seven years ago. Dalton headed to a cabin in northern Minnesota for a working family vacation of fishing and planning. The result was four classes aimed at freshmen and sophomores: Careers that Build, Working with People, Science Technology and Business Technology.

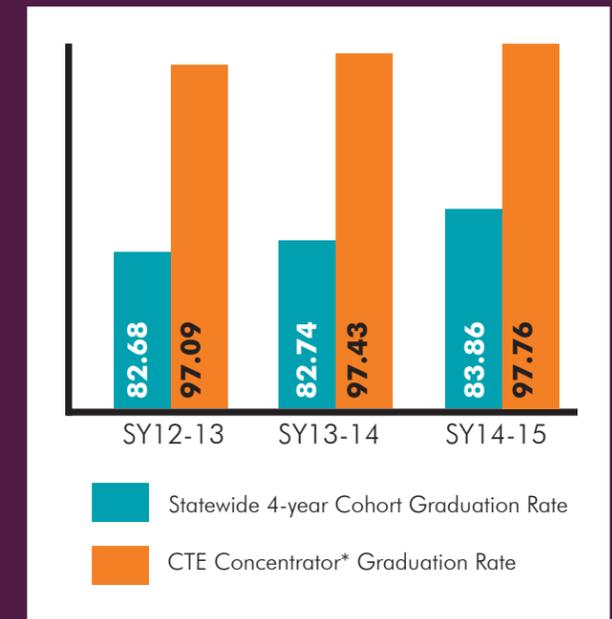
As part of the education and training unit, students in Dalton's Working with People class teach lessons to 6th graders. He uses his own experience to encourage their creativity, explaining that the plan he developed that first summer was about the size of a magazine. Now it's more like a novel. "You build on it every year," he says. "You find a technique that works better and get rid of what you started with. You're always adapting and trying to find something new or better."

In fall 2015, Dalton tried something new with his Business Technology class by having students participate in the BIG Idea Competition in which they developed businesses, complete with marketing plans, logos and more.

When the weather warms in the spring, Dalton gets students in his Careers that Build class outside for their architecture/construction unit. Every year students build a garden shed and sell it for the cost of materials. They also take requests: this year, they built a chicken coop for a local couple.

In Science Technology, Dalton turns the traditional egg drop into a 10-level gauntlet. Students create containers using no metal, no glass and weighing no more than four pounds. The containers must withstand everything from a toss in the air, to the swing of a baseball bat, to the smash of a cinder block and finally, level 10: a blow from a sledgehammer.

### Secondary Graduation



\*CTE Concentrator is a student who has earned two credits or more in a CTE program of study



If the egg activity piques students' interest, the learning experience comes full circle when a Watertown engineer who has helped design Honda four-wheeler frames talks to the class, helping them see engineering at work. Speakers and business tours are vital components of Dalton's courses. "Any time you call business people in the community, they're more than happy to give their time," he says. "They were a kid at one time, and they know how beneficial it is for their community."

Most educators have heard the exasperated question, *When am I ever going to use this?* Dalton turns the question into opportunity: *How many ways can students use this?*





## South Dakota awash in a linguistic ocean

“She’s like a magnet,” Kathy Keffeler (holding Uruguayan flag at left) said of Dr. Adriana Rabino’s rapport with students.

Keffeler is a world languages teacher in the Douglas School District in Box Elder. She hosted Rabino for two weeks in February 2016 as part of the Visiting Uruguayan Educator Program.

Rabino teaches English in Montevideo, Uruguay, and perhaps one reason she was so magnetic was because she quickly saw that for all the cultural differences between her home city of more than 1 million residents, and the much smaller Box Elder, teenagers around the world have a lot in common: “If you ask my students what they like to do, and you ask South Dakota students what they like to do, the answers are mostly the same,” she said.

Sometimes the language is even the same. “New words are coming every day,” Rabino said. “You see for instance, new items appearing, like selfie sticks. In Uruguay, in Spanish, we don’t say, ‘palo de selfie.’ We say, ‘selfie stick.’ Students were surprised, because it’s the same word you use here and in my country.”

It’s an example of what Keffeler calls the fluid nature of language: “If you think of water, especially with technology, the internet, texting, tweeting, everything. We’re constantly

washing each other in a linguistic ocean, if you will. When the tide goes out and comes back in, it’s going to leave some pebbles on the shore and those are going to be some of those words from other countries and other cultures.”

A cultural exchange can make people aware of commonalities, and Keffeler discovered it can also provide new perspective on one’s own life: “I have learned to see my life and my job through brand new eyes,” she said. “I think what I’ve seen in just the short time Adriana has been here is new vibrancy, new life, a lot of interest in our program, which is really exciting.”

Keffeler has previously participated in this program and encourages other teachers to try such an opportunity: “To host a teacher is probably one of the most rewarding and fun experiences a person can have. You share your life, your home, your table, your fun.”

When asked about their schedule, Keffeler laughed, because to quickly summarize the agenda would have been impossible—it was jam

“It’s like meeting another soul in the world who has something to share with you.”

packed. During Rabino’s visit, the two teachers left Keffeler’s home by 7 a.m. most days, often staying busy well into the evenings.

Rabino observed classes, gave presentations on her home country and observed middle and high school administrators. Keffeler scheduled a tour of Red Cloud Indian School. The two also visited the Badlands, Crazy Horse and Mount Rushmore. They attended school and professional sporting events, a community theatre production, even a Chinese New Year celebration at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology.

After two short weeks, Rabino returned home, but she and Keffeler have stayed in touch and are planning collaborative cross-cultural activities. “Everyone sees us and they say, ‘You look like sisters,’” Rabino said. “It’s like meeting another soul in the world who has something to share with you.”

“We call each other, ‘hermana,’ [sister] from time to time,” said Keffeler.





## A library full of text and tech

School librarian Jeff Cosier teaches Advanced Reading classes to 7th and 8th graders at North Middle School in Rapid City. “Advanced Reading” could also describe his approach to a school library.

A school library can open students’ minds to new opportunities, experiences, people and perspectives. And it need not be limited to words on a page.

One of Cosier’s classes focuses on research projects and developing strong information literacy skills. The other is a project-based class, in which students work in the makerspace he has been developing for the past two years. It’s been made possible in part by grants from the Vucurevich and Rapid City Public School foundations. The space includes a 3-D scanning camera and printer, Lego robotics kits, Raspberry Pi microprocessors, an Arduino microcontroller, video equipment and a drone equipped with a GoPro camera.

In addition to the high-tech gadgets, students have built everything from a fishing rod to a bass guitar. “It’s usually a very interesting hour of the day in here,” Cosier says.

Students can also visit the makerspace before and after school. Cosier says the 3-D printer has been especially popular. Students have enjoyed using the 3-D scanning camera to take pictures of friends and then print three-dimensional busts.

In the future, Cosier hopes to see teachers get more familiar with the various pieces of equipment and incorporate them into their classes as well. “I do have kids who will occasionally stop in and say, ‘I need to make this for my science fair project,’ or ‘I’d like to try to do this for a class,’” he says. “I’m thrilled when they come

in and say that. I would really like to see it move more that way.”



With all the technological hands-on opportunities in the library, Cosier still wants to make sure students are getting their hands on books too, whether hard copies or the electronic kind. He has been encouraging students to write online reviews of the books they read, so their classmates can see their feedback. “We’re really building a nice library of student-reviewed books,” he says. “Students can go in and search a book in the catalog system and then read reviews about that book that have been written by other students here in the building.”

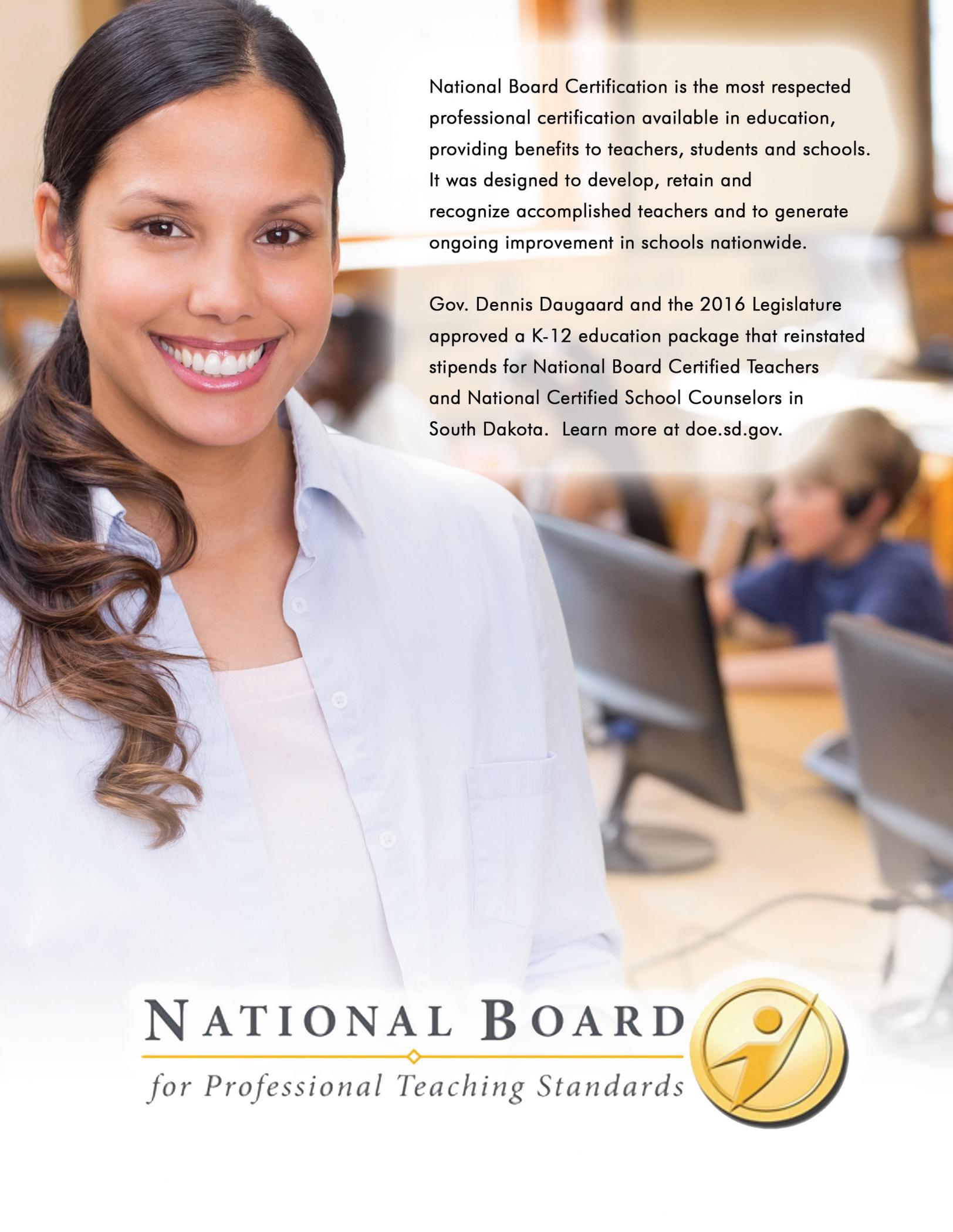
In March, North Middle School got in on the brackets action to determine the most popular book series in the school. It all came down to the “Lightning Thief” series versus “The Hunger Games.” In the end, “The Hunger Games” took the title.

“I like turning kids into readers,” Cosier says. “I’m proud that I’ve turned non-readers into readers. My love of books has been infectious.”



## 21st Century School Library Award

The South Dakota State Library recognizes the North Middle School library as an Enhanced 21st Century School Library. This program annually recognizes schools with libraries that meet the characteristics of a 21st century school library through their program, place (physical and online) and professionalism. Find more information at [library.sd.gov](http://library.sd.gov).



National Board Certification is the most respected professional certification available in education, providing benefits to teachers, students and schools. It was designed to develop, retain and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard and the 2016 Legislature approved a K-12 education package that reinstated stipends for National Board Certified Teachers and National Certified School Counselors in South Dakota. Learn more at [doe.sd.gov](http://doe.sd.gov).

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