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DOE announces 2024 Special Education Staff of the Year

SIOUX FALLS – The Department of Education’s (DOE) 2024 Special Education Staff of the Year is Julie Williams, a speech language pathologist and assistant special education director at Gettysburg School District.

Each year, the DOE’s Office of Special Education Programs invites families of students receiving special education services to nominate a special education staff member who has made an outstanding contribution to the education of their child. Nominees may include teachers, directors, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, or paraprofessionals who have served in their profession for three or more years.

The department received 78 nominations this year, the highest number it has received since it began the program in 2012. “We had a record number of nominations this year, which reaffirms the passion and commitment demonstrated daily by professionals working with students with special needs,” said Linda Turner, director of the DOE’s Division of Special Education and Early Learning.

Five finalists were chosen from those nominations, and Williams was announced as the winner on March 6 at the 2024 South Dakota Special Education Conference awards luncheon in Sioux Falls.

“Julie Williams embodies the mission of special education,” said Turner. “Her influence goes beyond supporting students to meet their goals, she also inspires colleagues and families to achieve positive outcomes for students with disabilities.”

The other four finalists for 2024 Special Education Staff of the Year were:

- Krislyn Carlson, special education teacher, Beresford School District
- John Haak, speech language pathologist, Sioux Falls School District
- Patti Schladweiler, special education teacher, Spearfish School District
- Bailey Zwhar, special education teacher, Meade School District