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South Dakota celebrates Teacher Appreciation Week and recognizes Regional Teachers of the Year

PIERRE, S.D. – May 6-10 is Teacher Appreciation Week, a time to celebrate the teachers who dedicate their time and energy to the futures of the youngest citizens in South Dakota communities.

“Teachers across the state create a lasting impact on South Dakota kids in hundreds of ways every day,” said Secretary of Education Joe Graves. “They teach, but they also lift up and guide their students through the difficulties and pains that have always been a part of growing up. A teacher’s impact goes far beyond the classroom -- their influence carries on years after their students leave the classroom.”

As part of the week’s events, the South Dakota Department of Education (DOE) announced the names of the state’s Regional Teachers of the Year.

The 2025 Regional Teachers of the Year are as follows:

- Region 1: Amy Verhelst, Kindergarten, Sioux Valley Elementary School, Volga
- Region 2: Erin Rieff, Art, Brandon Valley Middle School, Brandon
- Region 3: Megan Wilson, Math, Sanborn Central High School, Forestburg
- Region 4: Christy Saltsman, K-8 Physical Education and 6-8 Math, Gettysburg School District, Gettysburg
- Region 5: Michelle Abbott, 2nd grade, West Elementary School, Spearfish

A panel will select one of these regional finalists to represent the state as the 2025 South Dakota Teacher of the Year. That individual will be South Dakota’s candidate for the National Teacher of the Year Award.

DOE representatives will be visiting each of the Regional Teachers of the Year during Teacher Appreciation Week. They will be at Brandon Valley Middle School and Sioux Valley Elementary on Monday, at West Elementary on Tuesday, and at Sanborn Central and Gettysburg on Thursday.

Visit sdteach.org to hear some of the state’s finest educators talk about why they love the teaching profession.

Editor’s Note: Please consider contacting your local school(s) for potential stories about Teacher Appreciation Week celebrations in your community.