

EdMatters

Iredell-Statesville Schools Recognizes Achievements of Employees of the Year



Mr. Nicholas Allen, I-SS Principal of the Year, poses with his parents, wife, and children after receiving his award.

The Iredell-Statesville School District recognized 172 employees whose work earned them school and district honors on Friday, May 2, 2025, at the Performing Arts Center on the campus of South Iredell High School. These employees excelled in teaching students, leading schools, and providing support. The district honored these employees by holding a luncheon in their honor.

Superintendent Dr. Jeff James welcomed everyone with some opening remarks.

"Everyone of you, in your own unique role, contributes to the success of our students and the strength of our community," explained Dr. James. "You are the embodiment of dedication, the epitome of commitment, and the very definition of excellence."

He continued with his thanks and appreciation for the staff members.

"From the bottom of my heart, thank you. Thank you for your passion, your dedication, and your unwavering commitment to our students, our schools, and our community," stated Dr. James. "Congratulations to each and every one of you. You are truly deserving of this honor."

Certified and classified employees were honored with a plaque and walked across the stage as the audience cheered them on. Amongst the honorees, several employees were surprised with the news that they had been selected as the overall district winners.

Teacher of the Year



Lauren Gaither from North Iredell High School was named the I-SS Teacher of the Year. Ms. Gaither teaches Math and has been with Iredell-Statesville Schools for 17 years. Aimee Adkins, a parent whose three children had Ms. Gaither as a teacher posted on Facebook, "What she has

poured into math students for her entire career at North Iredell High School is nothing short of phenomenal," Adkins wrote. "She taught all three of my children." Ms. Gaither was shocked by the surprise announcement and greeted by her family members who joined her in the celebration.

Assistant Principal of the Year



Dina-Marie Spataro from Coddle Creek Elementary School was named the I-SS Assistant Principal of the Year. As an educator for 12 years, Mrs. Spataro began as an Elementary Classroom Teacher at Cloverleaf Elementary School before becoming the Assistant Principal at Coddle Creek.

On the nomination form, one colleague said, "Mrs. Spataro truly keeps our school going! Her genuine heart and dedication to the staff and students is evident every day," they stated. "No matter what she is facing, she has a smile on her face and is willing to jump in and help us. Her leadership is what every school needs!"

Principal of the Year



Nicholas Allen was named the I-SS Principal of the Year. Mr. Allen is currently serving as the Principal at Harmony Elementary School. He became a part of the Iredell-Statesville Schools team in July 2021 as the Assistant Principal at Celeste Henkel Elementary School. Mr. Allen

has been in the education field for 11 years. One of the nominations that was received on behalf of Mr. Allen, stated, "We are incredibly fortunate to have Mr. Allen as our principal at Harmony Elementary. He has a sincere focus on learning for our students. As a staff, we take great pride knowing that we are a major part in the way our school functions. He has given us a voice. We are

invested in our students, their families, and in one another." Mr. Allen was surprised with his parents, wife, and children joining in his celebration.

Teacher Assistant of the Year



Mary Whitlow from East Iredell Elementary School was named the I-SS Teacher Assistant of the Year. She has been a Teacher Assistant and Bus Driver for the past three years. Upon her arrival back to the school, students and staff members lined the hallways and

cheered for her. East Iredell Elementary Principal, Jennifer Ribbeck, stated, "We are so proud of [Mrs. Whitlow] and we had so much fun celebrating her with a Cobra Country Walk of Fame."

Bus Driver of the Year



Lisa Watters from Celeste Henkel Elementary School was named the I-SS Bus Driver of the Year. Ms. Watters has been working in education for eleven years and has been a part of the I-SS team since 2020. She serves as a Bus Driver and Teacher Assistant at Celeste Henkel Elementary. In 2024, Ms. Watters was named the I-SS Teacher Assistant of the Year.



In addition to these honors, the following were also named overall district winners:

- School Office Support Personnel of the Year: Meredith Booth
- District Office Support Personnel of the Year: Kerri Turner
- Media Coordinator of the Year: Dana Gillis
- Technician of the Year: Scotty Brown
- Bookkeeper of the Year: Jessica Christopher
- Elementary Instructional Facilitator of the Year: Kimberly Keaton
- Secondary Instructional Facilitator of the Year: Daniel Roseman
- Prime Time Coordinator of the Year: Maria Gant
- Prime Time Group Leader of the Year: Kelsey Mills
- School Nutrition Employee of the Year: Johnnie Wilder
- School Nutrition Manager of the Year: Diane Espel
- Student Services Employee of the Year: Josie Myers
- Guidance Counselor of the Year: Lynn Stone
- School Nurse of the Year: Mandy Brawley
- Mechanic of the Year: Cody Moose
- Custodian of the Year: Julio Suarez
- NCCAT Beginning Teacher of the Year: Noah Estes
- Elementary District Teacher of the Year: Kelly Cook
- Secondary District Teacher of the Year: Tyler Horton

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