2020 South Carolina Honor Roll
Teachers of the Year

Tamara Cox

Tamara Cox is a Media Specialist at Wren High School in Anderson School District One. Ms. Cox is a National Board Certified educator who also serves as the legislative chair for the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL). She is a Nominee for the SCASL Librarian of the Year and the recipient of the American Library Association 2018 I Love My Librarian Award. Tamara’s blogs, “Eliterate Librarian” received several national award nominations. Tamara regularly attends National Library Legislative Day in Washington, DC where she uses her teacher voice to advocate for public education and library funding. She originally began as a Social Studies teacher, but left the profession to climb the corporate ladder, until she gave into “a nagging voice” that drew her back to education. A choice that positively changed her life forever. Ms. Cox believes stories have the power to “connect us as human beings, enlighten and empower us to change, both ourselves and our society.” She uses her library to help students practice critical thinking, ethical use of information, and interpersonal skills with group projects. Collaborating with her fellow teachers and administration she works to meet the goals of a South Carolina graduate by increasing the global perspective of her students; connecting them with authors and experts, in-person and virtually. Her passion for students and collaboration extended outside of her classroom when she collaborated with a local university to motivate students to participate in a summer reading program for rising ninth graders.
Stephanie Haecherl is a second grade teacher at Mamie P. Whitesides Elementary in Charleston County School District. As a National Board Certified educator, she served as an author contributor to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Ms. Haecherl received national recognition when she became one of twenty-two teachers on the Scholastic Book Clubs Teacher Advisory Board. Reaching out locally and nationally she has directly affected student-learning school-wide by securing over thirty grants. Stephanie possessed the desire to teach at a very young age. She is a lifelong learner who after attending her first Engineering in Elementary workshop was “hooked” on STEAM. She refers to her teaching style as “eclectic”; a small window into her classroom reveals a variety of activities, such as oil pastels used to illustrate how students visualized a story. Her classroom inspires creativity, nurtures critical thinking skills and allows students to “think outside of the box.” Stephanie is a community minded educator who is passionate about her profession and illustrates these commitments by finding ways for parents to participate in education by serving as weekly mystery readers. She seeks mentoring opportunities wherever possible, mentoring student teachers from local colleges and universities and educators new to the profession. She relishes the opportunity to mentor recognizing the “unlimited learning possibilities that can transpire as a result of letting experience marinate with new perspectives and strategies.”
Shelley Smith

Shelley Smith is an eleventh through twelfth grade Social Studies teacher at Travelers Rest High School in Greenville County Schools. Shelley is a Master Teacher for the Teacher Residency Program at Clemson University and she received a nomination for the Gilder Lehram Institute of American History’s National History Teacher of the Year award. At eight years old, she knew she wanted to become a teacher. She recognized the difference each of her own teachers made in her life and wanted to become a “difference-maker” herself. Recognizing the importance of her role as an educator, she aspires to model service to others in a multitude of ways. Building floats for homecoming week, volunteering to attend a shift at prom, mentoring and supervising student teachers, leading innovative professional development, or writing district curriculum is how Shelley gives to her school community. She bases her philosophy of teaching on a John Quincy Adams quote “To furnish the means of acquiring knowledge is…the greatest benefit that can be conferred upon mankind...” Her goal is to teach every student how to overcome challenges in the face of adversity. This begins in her classroom where she makes a point to establish a positive learning environment and chooses instructional methods to support student learning across disciplines, fostering international-mindedness and encouraging the development of self-awareness. An example of this can be found in her U.S. History class where she guides her students through the stages of a gradual release model moving from whole group practice, then to small group and pair activities, and ultimately, to individual application and assessment.
Sue Weems is a 10th-11th grade English teacher at Blythewood High School in Richland School District Two. Sue a National Board Certified educator, received a Distinction for Excellence for her Master’s thesis, and is a published author of fifty original short stories for students grades Kindergarten through sixth. Sue descends from a long line of high school and college teachers, but originally did not pursue the family profession. While working as an assistant manager for a retail-clothing store she offered the position of assistant manager because of her innate teaching abilities. While offering her the position the manager challenged Sue to consider the difference she would make in the world as a teacher instead. The manager’s words led her to change her major to education. She considers teachers purveyors of hope and as a military spouse, she has had the privilege to teach students at every level from kindergarten through post-secondary education across the United States. While teaching college, one of her students noted, “You are the only professor who knows and call me by name.” She considers her most profound legacy is deeply understanding her students and individualizing instruction to meet their needs. Her teaching mantra is “care, connect, and challenge.” She builds trust with students shaking hands and encouraging all to speak in a way that values each other. She guides students through lessons meant to challenge in order to build new skills. She does this by encouraging them to lean into frustration while analyzing difficult poetry, then apply the same strategies learned to different poets and topics of their choosing. While working through themes of a novel in her sophomore English class, students have the option of teaching a theme to the class, writing a paragraph and sharing with a peer, or creating a video montage for class viewing. When preparing students for class discussion she requests that each student write questions on three levels of thinking. This technique was so effective, a parent, who was a Navy doctor in charge of training reached out to her requesting to use the strategy and materials in his teaching rounds.