VESTAVIA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER JENNIFER BROWN NAMED ALABAMA’S 2015-2016 TEACHER OF THE YEAR
Trace Crossings Elementary School Teacher Minette Wiggins Named Alternate TOY

Montgomery, Ala. – Jennifer Brown, a science teacher at Vestavia Hills High School in the Vestavia Hills City School System, is the 2015-2016 Alabama Teacher of the Year.

A graduate of the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of Montevallo, Brown originally dreamed of becoming a starting player in the WNBA. However, teaching young athletes how to play another sport (softball) made her realize she was destined instead for a career in education. Now in her 16th year as a teacher, Brown cannot imagine doing anything else.

“I am privileged to have the opportunity to affect lives every single day. It is my goal to create a student-centered classroom packed with diverse individuals who are inspired by my passion and unafraid to make mistakes,” Brown said. “I think I am an outstanding teacher, but I know I can be better. I will continue to improve by experimenting with new strategies and by taking my own risks so that my students will enjoy an extraordinary learning experience.”
State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice announced Brown was chosen to serve as the official spokesperson and representative for teachers in Alabama for the next year near the end of a celebration honoring the 12 semi-finalists and 4 finalists who were nominated for the coveted title. The awards ceremony is held annually in recognition of these teachers’ dedication to education in Alabama public schools.

Bice thanked all of the district finalists for their commitment to helping their students achieve success in the classroom and beyond. He said the honorees are dedicated, caring, enthusiastic educators whose efforts are key to preparing Alabama’s children to become capable adults.

Of Brown, Bice said, “Jennifer Brown embodies the best of what quality instruction looks like in action. Her passion for cultivating life-long learners and helping her students achieve a depth of understanding of science and real-world science application is displayed in her classroom every day. We are proud to have her represent our state as the 2015-2016 Alabama Teacher of the Year.”

Brown has taught ninth- and tenth-grade Applied Physical Sciences, Physical Science and Biology at Vestavia Hills High School since 2002. She delights in sharing her love of science and longing for learning with her students every day, is passionate about student achievement and believes all of her students have the ability to succeed.

In addition, the Vestavia Hills High School Key Club co-sponsor and Ultimate Frisbee Club advisor is an advocate for servant leadership, believing that “service to others is one of the greatest feelings in the world.”

Vestavia Hills Superintendent Sheila Phillips said that Brown has all the attributes one looks for in the finest of educators: “Her level of professionalism, coupled with her heart of service, is incredibly impressive and seen in all she does.”

Minette Wiggins, a first-grade teacher at Trace Crossings Elementary School in the Hoover City School System, is the 2015-2016 Alternate State Teacher of the Year. Serving as a camp counselor at a church camp was all it took to solidify her decision to pursue a teaching degree.

Having taught in both rural and suburban school systems, Wiggins, a graduate of Troy State University and the University of South Alabama, does not believe there is a one-size-fits-all curriculum. She strives to create a 21st century learning environment for her first graders where instruction is personalized, project-based and hands-on.
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The National Board Certified teacher treasures her students’ enthusiasm for learning and their unconditional trust in her to lead them toward achievement and growth.

“My successes are when a child is excited about something he has learned, when she has an ‘ah-ha’ moment, when he achieves a goal and when academics makes a difference to the individual life of a child,” Wiggins said. “My students inspire me daily to be the best teacher I can be, and they deserve nothing less. I am so very proud to be a small part of the teaching world.”

The selection process for Alabama’s Teacher of the Year begins at the school system level. Each school system can nominate an elementary and secondary teacher at the district level. One elementary teacher and one secondary teacher are selected from each of the eight state Board of Education districts. A state selection committee selects 4 teachers from the 16 district finalists to be interviewed for the titles Alabama Teacher of the Year and Alternate State Teacher of the Year.

Brown and Wiggins will spend much of the 2015-2016 school year serving as ambassadors for public education and the teaching profession. Brown automatically becomes Alabama’s nominee for National Teacher of the Year.

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