



Norfolk Public Schools
The cornerstone of a proudly diverse community

For Immediate Release
June 12, 2020

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Kathy O'Hara, Office of
Communications and Media Relations,
757-620-3304, kohara@nps.k12.va.us

Barbara Hunter, Office of
Communications and Media Relations,
703-863-8025, bhunter@nps.k12.va.us

**Norfolk Public Schools Announces 2020 Division-wide Teacher of the Year,
High School Teacher of the Year, and Middle School Teacher of the Year**

Norfolk, VA— **Jason Koonce**, a mathematics specialist at Oceanair Elementary School, has been named the 2020 Norfolk Public Schools Teacher of the Year (TOY). Koonce was notified of his selection Friday by Superintendent Dr. Sharon I. Byrdsong. Accompanying Dr. Byrdsong for the notification were Acting Deputy Superintendent of Academic Affairs Dr. Michael Cataldo; Executive Director of Secondary Schools John Coleman; and Acting Directors of Elementary Schools Dr. Doreatha White and Maritsa Alger. Dr. Byrdsong and her team also made visits to two other schools to acknowledge the teachers of the year for the high school and middle school levels. The High School Teacher of the Year is **Kimberly Ambrose**, a theatre arts teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, and the Middle School Teacher of the Year is **Holly Holm**, a language arts teacher, at the Academy for Discovery at Lakewood.

Koonce, a 13-year veteran teacher, has served Oceanair for four years as a mathematics specialist. He approaches classroom instruction by believing in students, refusing to let them give in to an "I can't do math" attitude. He analyzes data regularly to ascertain what the stumbling blocks might be for students so he can provide the resources necessary for them to succeed. He strengthens that all-important home-to-school connection by meeting regularly with parents on a one-to-one basis and by hosting in-house workshops for them. He also has been instrumental in providing professional development for his fellow teachers in math instruction, believing that a whole school focus will result in large-scale competency in math among all students. No detail or job is too insignificant for Koonce, who is known for his positivity. Prior to the pandemic, he volunteered each morning for parking lot duty during student arrival time. He is the teacher most students see first and he sends them off to class with a smile and encouragement.

Ambrose, a 14-year veteran teacher, has served Booker T. Washington High School as a theatre arts teacher for two years. A graduate of the school, she has provided many opportunities for students by cultivating strategic partnerships with other fine arts and community

organizations such as Norfolk State University Theatre, the Virginia Stage Company and the New Calvary Baptist Church Theatre Ministry. Funded by a Virginia Humanities grant, in partnership with the previously named organizations, BTWHS' Academy of Visual and Performing Arts students had the opportunity to devise and perform an original piece of theatre. In addition, her students participated in the development of the first August Wilson Monologue Competition to be held in Virginia. She works hard to ensure her students have appropriate resources. She was instrumental in converting her classroom space into a multi-functioning flexible seating classroom/Black Box Theatre. Prior to the pandemic, Ambrose made herself available to students during lunch and after hours for academic tutoring.

Holm has a 21-year background in teaching, the last five at the Academy for Discovery at Lakewood. As a language arts teacher for seventh and eighth grade students, Holm is known for constantly searching for new tools and strategies to engage her students in critical thinking. She implements meaningful action into her lessons by asking students to explore the world through text and "to take a stand" for what they believe in. For example, she and her student became involved in the Water for South Sudan's Iron Giraffe Challenge after reading the novel, *A Long Walk to Water*. As part of the Iron Giraffe Challenge, students worked collaboratively to help bring clean water to a village in South Sudan. She facilitated complex conversations about poverty, not just on the international level, but the local level as well, implementing a tour of the Food Bank and supporting a student-led food drive. Because she believes in the positive impact of the teaching profession, she also serves as a mentor to student teachers, practicum students, and education majors participating in classroom observations.

"Public education is a life-changing force. Each and every one of us has had a teacher we can remember as being pivotal to our success. For many Norfolk Public Schools' children, these teachers fall in that category. Many of the lessons that they have shared will remain with their students for the rest of their lives. I am privileged to recognize their positive influence and to celebrate what is truly one of the most important professions in the world," said Dr. Byrdsong

These three educators were selected from 53 teachers of the year representing all NPS schools, centers and programs. TOYs complete an application demonstrating their successes and are initially selected by their school, center, or program. Completed applications are then forwarded to a central committee that reviews all applications and subsequently selects the Teacher of the Year and two other school-level finalists.

###

Norfolk Public Schools (NPS) is on a mission to ensure that all students maximize their academic potential, develop skills for lifelong learning, and become successful contributors to a global society. We believe Norfolk Public Schools is the cornerstone of a proudly diverse community with highly qualified teachers and staff dedicated to providing diverse teaching and learning opportunities for all students.