

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: Ocean County Educator Named 2022-2023 State Teacher of the Year

10/12/2022

Trenton, NJ – The New Jersey Department of Education today announced that Christine Girtain, a Science Teacher and the Director of Authentic Science Research at Toms River High School North and South, has been named the 2022-2023 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

Christine, a graduate of Toms River Schools herself, has been teaching science for 28 years, including Earth Science, Biology, and Authentic Science Research. The Authentic Science Research program at the Toms River Regional School District is a three-year elective program that allows students to pursue and conduct independent research on a specific science topic that interests them. As the director, she has guided student projects ranging from the effects of fruit seed extracts on bacteria, to bioengineering *E. coli*. Her students have connected with Penn State researchers to learn about microbes that may block the spread of the Dengue and Zika viruses, and they have been to an immersive research program in the rainforests of Costa Rica.

"A cornerstone of my Administration has been fostering STEM learning for our students," **said Governor Phil Murphy**. "We know that high-paying, high-demand STEM careers can help young people achieve success after graduating high school. Our students are the future leaders of our state and by preparing them with a strong educational foundation in science, we will help fuel the growth of New Jersey's economy. Christine embodies the spirit of innovation that we are seeing in our schools and throughout our State. Her hard work and dedication to her students will help prepare our next generation of leaders. Congratulations to Christine Girtain for being named New Jersey State Teacher of the Year."

"One of the greatest celebrations that we have in education is naming the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year," **said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education**. "The Teacher of the Year serves as an exemplar of the kinds of dynamic instruction that is occurring in classrooms throughout New Jersey, and Christine truly sets the standard for innovation. The way she ignites an interest in the sciences will benefit her students long after high school. Her students are fortunate to have her as a teacher."

"On behalf of the State Board of Education, I congratulate Mrs. Christine Girtain on being selected as the 2022-2023 State Teacher of the Year," **said Kathy Goldenberg, President of the State Board of Education**. "Mrs. Girtain's passion for education and research with her focus on agricultural STEM literacy undoubtedly will elevate this vital field throughout the Garden State's public schools and beyond our state's borders."

Christine credits her parents with instilling a love of learning and a sense of adventure in her and her brother, Paul, who is a history teacher at Toms River High School North – the school where their mother worked as a secretary for years.

Christine's career path began 32 years ago when, during a teacher shortage, she received a Governor's Teaching Scholarship from Governor Jim Florio. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree in biology with a concentration in education from The College of New Jersey, and a master's degree in earth science instruction and curriculum from Kean University.

She was twice recognized as her school's Teacher of the Year, and is the New Jersey science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) Pathways 2019 STEM Teacher of the Year. She is also a 2021 state finalist for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. In addition, Christine has brought in more than \$185,000 in grant funds to fund student research projects and STEM camps.

"Christine Girtain personifies what it means to be a teacher here in Ocean County and Toms River, which is student-focused and with a passion to develop our children into lifelong learners," **said Michael Citta, Superintendent of the Toms River Regional School District**. "Ms. Girtain operates without physical or intellectual boundaries—she has organized national and international science-based trips, and her educational approach and sheer personality challenge her students and colleagues to think beyond the ordinary. The result of her teaching is that students believe anything is possible, and their achievements reflect that."

"Ms. Girtain has established an academic structure that pushes students and enables them to realize their untapped potential. Additionally, her educational presence impacts her colleagues as she both inspires and encourages the professionals around her," **said Kevin Raylman, Principal of Toms River High School South**. "Whether it is an intense student driven experiment or through something as mundane as a collegial conversation in the hallway, Ms. Girtain is making a positive and profound change."

"Authentic Science Research has long been a source of pride here at Toms River High School North," **said Ed Keller, Principal of Toms River High School North**. "This is a direct result of the hard work and dedication exhibited by Mrs. Christine Girtain. Mrs. Girtain challenges her students to be the best they can be while offering the support they need to ensure their success."

Christine and her husband Andy enjoy traveling and visiting Barnegat Bay, and she also enjoys doing ancestry research. She has a daughter, Jamie, and a son, Josh.

In her role as State Teacher of the Year, Christine will work with the New Jersey Department of Education and give presentations to colleagues and stakeholders around the State, speak with aspiring teachers, and visit classrooms to advance the teaching profession and inspire interest in the STEM fields. She will also take part in national conferences with other State Teachers of the Year.

Christine was one of four finalists for New Jersey State Teacher of the Year. The finalists received the highest scores on their applications and their interviews with a distinguished panel of representatives from the State's education associations and other stakeholder groups.

The other three finalists are: Daryl Detrick, a computer science teacher at Warren Hills Regional High School in the Warren Hills Regional School District, Warren County; Ian Evans, an English teacher at Hillsborough Middle Schools, Hillsborough Township School District, Somerset County; and Leana Malinowsky, a second-grade teacher at Private Nicholas Minue School, Carteret School District, Middlesex County.

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