

April 22, 2020 – Staunton City Schools Announces 2020 Teachers of the Year

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STAUNTON CITY SCHOOLS ANNOUNCES 2020 TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

Staunton City Schools is pleased to announce the 2020 Teachers of the Year from each school. Teachers at each school nominate and vote for one of their peers to be a school-level teacher of the year, prior to a committee selecting one of the representatives as the final division-wide teacher of the year, using criteria outlined by the state. All of the teachers that are being recognized have demonstrated an interest in continuous learning, as shown through advanced coursework and workshops, as well as developing others, through mentorships and trainings. Collectively, the six teachers being recognized have contributed 70 years in education.

“Each of our teachers of the year are not only exceptional educators, but genuinely caring, sincere, and humble citizens too. We are pleased to be able to honor our teachers each year for the amazing contributions they make for our students and our families,” states Executive Director of Instruction, Stephanie Haskins.

Mrs. Lisa Cooper, 1st grade teacher

2020 Bessie Weller Teacher of the Year AND 2020 Staunton City Schools Teacher of the Year



Mrs. Lisa Cooper has been a teacher for the past 11 years, and this is the third time she has been recognized with distinguished awards for teaching excellence, including 2009 Teacher of Promise, 2014 Teacher of the Year in Buena Vista, and 2020 Teacher of the Year in Staunton. Mrs. Cooper has been a contributor on literacy committees and authored and shared the Grade 5 literacy curriculum for the division. She has worked with such groups as Girls on the Run and Community Garden Service Project. If you’ve ever been in Mrs. Cooper’s classroom and watched her in action or listened to her reading aloud to students, you will be completely drawn in! You won’t want to leave!

Mrs. Cooper shared how her own life experiences have impacted why she became a teacher and what she brings to teaching every day: “I wanted to have an impact on children just the way that my teachers had helped me to overcome an obstacle that I thought had been insurmountable. It took many years before this dream was fulfilled and brought to fruition, but every sacrifice, sleepless night, and struggle endured was worth it. . . Throughout my educational career, I strive to build and maintain meaningful relationships with each child. I want them to know that they are important. They are loved. They are cared for. This is what matters to me. The relationships forged during the course of the year, and ones that carry over past the school year into the future are one of my most significant accomplishments.”

**Mrs. Leslie Hite, School Counselor
2020 McSwain Elementary Teacher of the Year**



Mrs. Leslie Hite grew up through Staunton City Schools, attending Bessie Weller Elementary, where her current principal, Ms. Crocker, served as counselor at the time and long-time mentor for a future career in counseling. Mrs. Hite has started the Therapeutic Day Treatment program at McSwain 11 years ago, before transitioning to the role of counselor for the past five years. In addition to her contributions at work, Mrs. Hite has also contributed to the community and world with mission work in Africa, a partnership with the Office on Youth and Hospice of Piedmont, and disaster relief coordinator through a local church.

Mrs. Hite wrote, “The relationships that I have developed with my students are my greatest accomplishment. The love I have for my students is pure and true. I advocate for my students, and I have a contagious calm that can comfort others during even the hardest of issues. It is my belief that all students have value and that all students can learn and be productive members of our society. Through my counseling work and building relationships, I strive to lessen barriers and to help students become the best students and individuals they can be. School counseling is exactly where I am supposed to be at this time. It is my calling, and is fulfilling in every way. I am passionate about my career and love each day spent at school.”

**Mrs. Sonya Hoover, Kindergarten Teacher
2020 Ware Elementary Teacher of the Year**



Mrs. Sonya Hoover has been a Kindergarten teacher in Staunton City Schools for the past 25 years. Mrs. Hoover was a major contributor in a writing workshop training in Staunton Schools, and she continues to develop a love and passion for writing among her kindergarten students and fellow educators. She actively involves her families through such initiatives as daily notebooks, take-home toolkits, and curriculum nights. Mrs. Hoover has also served an active role in the community, serving as the Relay for Life team captain for consecutive years.

Mrs. Hoover explained her love for teaching and learning: “There is no greater joy to me than to have grown adults come running up to me in a grocery store yelling my name. They inevitably ask, “Do you know who I am?” When I can recall their entire name, I tell them I still see their little kindergarten face, not the adult standing in front of me. Parents of former students have brought me to tears on more than one occasion as they fill me in on what their son or daughter has gone on to accomplish in the years since leaving high school. When they credit me with “starting” their son or daughter off on the “right path” my heart swells with pride. I have day care owners, teachers, law enforcement and military officers, medical field workers, business owners, dancers, artists and service industry providers of all types that I have had the privilege and honor of teaching. I was able to be a part of their lives in some small way. That is my greatest accomplishment.”

**Mrs. Dana Folks, Family and Consumer Science Teacher
2020 Shelburne Middle Teacher of the Year**



Mrs. Dana Folks has been a teacher for 13 years, serving 10 years in the local area and three years in Texas. As part of her role as Family and Consumer Science teacher, Mrs. Folks serves as advisor for Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) as well as a member of the Virginia FCCLA star events management team. A few years ago, she was tasked with developing a new class for 6th graders focused on career exploration, where she challenges students to consider a variety of college and career pathways and options.

Mrs. Folks explained: “One of my biggest joys is being able to teach and get to know every student that comes through 6th grade in Staunton City Schools. I then get to grow those relationships as they move through 7th and 8th grade. Building a relationship with all

students is a priority to me, without having that you cannot expect students to give you their all. I make sure to let my students know I care about them, not only as a student but as a person. While school is certainly a priority as a young adult, so is developing strategies to take care of student’s emotional and mental health. I work hard to help students see the big picture and to find balance in their lives, while also having high expectations of them academically and behaviorally.”

**Ms. Theresa Stoecker, Spanish Teacher
2020 Staunton High Teacher of the Year**



Ms. Stoecker has been a teacher in Staunton City Schools for the past two years. Prior to teaching in Staunton, Ms. Stoecker received the Teachers of Promise award, served as a Latino and Migrant Aid through the Madison House, and worked as an English Language Assistant in Madrid, Spain. In addition to attending and participating in professional development, Ms. Stoecker was also a recent recipient of the 2019 Valley Alliance for Education Grant.

Ms. Stoecker described her journey as a teacher: “Over the past two years at Staunton High, family, friends, and strangers have frequently asked me how it is going. I never hesitate to respond by explaining how the students have been the key factor that makes it all worth it. I make great effort to impart my passion for Spanish, and the people who speak it, into my students’ hearts and minds, while building

lasting, impactful relationships. I hope that someday my class will influence the lens with which the students see the world around them so that they are better prepared to be the empathetic, compassionate global citizens that this world needs. Not every day is easy, but it sure is rewarding.”

Ms. Leslie Schallock, English Teacher
2020 Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center Teacher of the Year



Prior to her educational career at the Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center, Ms. Schallock has served as a teaching fellow and AmeriCorps volunteer. Ms. Schallock has made multiple contributions both to the school and community as a Shenandoah Green Community advocate (supporting local waste reduction initiatives), High Rocks Educational Corporation volunteer (hosting overnight stays for high school girls on college touring trips), SAW Resistance Revival Chorus (social and environmental activism through performances), Mary Baldwin theatre collaboration (co-planning Shakespeare units), and SCS University presenter (focusing on anti-racism).

Ms. Schallock explained her pathway and focus as a teacher: “Having grown up in a similar Appalachian context in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, I am quick to stamp out the judgment that schools with more means provide more meaningful educational experiences. I currently practice my own meaningful work as a fifth year English teacher working with at-risk youth at Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center. While not in the crosshairs of a natural disaster, these students are at a crossroads, paused for a time in their own tumultuous lives to try to make a change. In this case, the one-room schoolhouse style classroom is no bane, but a boon in building an immersive space that feeds off the collective gifts of the class. For students who learned to see themselves as deficient, it is building those “I cans” that work to reinvent their outlook. Their resilience feeds my own in the pursuit of equitable education in spite of birth, circumstances, or schooling. I hope to continue to help young minds see their strengths and play with new ways of thinking in the years to come.”

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