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2007 National Teacher of the Year Finalists Chosen

Washington, DC, January 17, 2007 — A public school teacher from Arkansas, Kansas, New Mexico, or Washington State will be selected this year as the 57th recipient of the nation's top teaching honor -- National Teacher of the Year -- according to Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the [Council of Chief State School Officers](http://www.ccsso.org) (CCSSO). The National Teacher of the Year Program, sponsored by the ING Foundation, is a project of CCSSO.

"The Council is honored to present these four national finalists as representative of the great teaching that goes on in America's classrooms each and every day," said Wilhoit. "We at CCSSO know that the responsibility of ensuring student learning falls squarely on the shoulders of the teacher and any of these four will ably carry the message of learning to the American people as the 2007 National Teacher of the Year."

Rhonda Mims, President of the ING Foundation adds, "ING is proud as a company to directly serve the financial needs of teachers throughout the nation and we're especially proud to be sponsoring the premier program that honors the nation's teachers and highlights their accomplishments."

The four finalists for 2007 are:



[Justin Minkel—2007 Arkansas Teacher of the Year](#)

Minkel is a second grade teacher at Jones Elementary School in Springdale, Arkansas. He has taught a total of seven years and been an educator at Jones, a school of 522 students, for three years.

"When I began teaching it struck me partway through the year that the debate among biologists between 'nature' and 'nurture' was incomplete. Each child in my classroom had something kindled within them that could not be attributed to either their home environment or to genetics. I still do not know whether to call that essential quality 'soul,' 'spirit' or to leave it unnamed, but I believe everything we do as teachers should honor that individual light within each child. Schools in every country in the world are notorious for creating mechanisms that seek to mold children to the systems created by adults. I believe that we should be doing the opposite: shaping our systems to each child and each community of children who walk through our doorways each year."



[Joshua M. Anderson—2007 Kansas Teacher of the Year](#)

Anderson is a Speech, Debate and language arts teacher (grades 9-12) at Olathe Northwest High School in Olathe, Kansas. He has taught for 10 years, four at Northwest which has 1,152 students.

*“We are in danger of becoming a nation purely devoted to producing empty children with outstanding test scores. We pay close attention to the needs and wishes of employers and universities, but do so at the expense of our national culture. The evidence for this is deeply woven into our daily instruction. When a child asks why she needs to know the four methods for factoring a quadratic equation, what is our answer? If a student asks when he will ever use **The Scarlet Letter** in the real world, how do we respond? Too often, our answers center on the need to use math and reading as tickets to get a good job or get into college. These answers ignore our human quest for a global understanding of a world that transcends money and careers.”*



[Tamra A. Tiong—2007 New Mexico Teacher of the Year](#)

Tiong is a special education teacher (kindergarten through second grade) at Dulce Elementary School in Dulce, New Mexico. She has taught for eight years, four of them at Dulce Elementary which has 293 students.

“I know that as teachers we often feel overburdened and underpaid, and the pressures to push our students to perform well on standardized tests can be enormous. But we absolutely must do whatever we can to keep alive the joy of teaching and learning. High expectations and standards, and proficiency in reading and math do not have to exclude the passion and engagement that called us to teach in the first place. In fact, if we truly want children to grow into lifelong learners who will have the drive and the desire to contribute positively to their communities, we must keep the rich, relevant, interesting and meaningful content in our curricula.”



[Andrea Peterson—2007 Washington Teacher of the Year](#)

Peterson is a music teacher (grades 1-6) at Monte Cristo Elementary School in Granite Falls, Washington. She has taught at this school of 500 students for all 10 of her years in the education profession, the last eight years full time.

“Too often, our society accepts mediocrity as satisfactory. In and out of school, we tell children it is acceptable to do things incorrectly, as long as they feel good about themselves. The intrinsic problem, of course, is that human beings never feel good about themselves unless they are achieving. America’s students are frustrated because they know they are being short-changed; they know they are achieving below their true potential. We need to challenge students, not lowering our expectations so they can achieve grade level standards lower than they should be. We are doing a further disservice because students are not learning that facing difficulties is an opportunity for learning. We are simply removing difficulties, thereby losing most true learning.”

A panel of educators, representing the 15 largest national education organizations, chose the finalists from the 2007 teachers of the year representing the U.S. states, four U.S. territories, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity, and will select the 2007 National Teacher of the Year. Recognition by President George W. Bush of the national honoree and the state representatives will take place during the week of April 23, 2007.

The organizations represented on the National Selection Committee are: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, Association for Childhood Education International, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Association of Teacher Educators, National Association for the Education of

Young Children, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, National Education Association, National Middle Schools Association, National School Boards Association, and National School Public Relations Association.

For a list of 2007 state teachers of the year, please visit our website at www.ntoy.org.

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks members' consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public. For more information, visit www.ccsso.org.

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