

Holste is Watauga Teacher of the Year

Written by Marshal Ashcraft, Watauga Schools
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Gina Holste of Valle Crucis School has been chosen as the Watauga County Schools Teacher of the Year for 2013-14, marking the second year in a row that a Valle Crucis teacher has won the honor.

"These are the reasons for this award," said Holste, gesturing toward the students in her class. "This is so exciting and it's such an honor to move forward to represent the Watauga County Schools." Holste will now be a candidate for Northwest Region Teacher of the Year and could go on to compete for the title of NC Teacher of the Year.

Valle Crucis Principal Martha Clark said "I am so proud of Gina Holste! She transforms her classroom into an interactive, challenging and exciting learning environment for all of her students, and she always displays a positive attitude and nurturing disposition."

Holste is a third grade teacher in her seventh year with the Watauga County Schools, but getting to the seventh year hasn't been all smooth sailing. She spent her first two and a half years in interim teaching assignments and had to reapply for a new position as each assignment ended. Her early years in the classroom also included two stints in what one principal described as the "teacher crusher" duty of handling classes with two grade levels. Gina Holste, 2013-14 WCS Teacher of the Year with Katie Matthews, 2012-13 WCS Teacher of the Year

Board Member Ron Henries, a retired educator who served as a principal and teacher in the Watauga County Schools during his career, said each of the Board members was extremely impressed with Holste and all the Teachers of the Year. "Several of us on the Board have spent more than a few years as educators, and we're convinced that all nine of these teachers are some of the most outstanding professionals we've ever known. We are enormously proud of each of you." Speaking to Holste, Henries added "we understand the hardships you went through to get to this day and we appreciate all that you have achieved. We know you will do a wonderful job of representing our schools as the Teacher of the Year."

Dr. Wayne Eberle, testing coordinator for the Watauga County Schools and former principal at Valle Crucis, also praised Holste. "She has demonstrated great perseverance and tenacity in pursuing her passion for teaching, and she is a caring and supportive professional who values her relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. She gives everything to her profession."

In addition to Holste, the 2013-14 Teachers of the Year in the Watauga County Schools include Lindsey Wilson of Bethel, Susan Trew of Blowing Rock, Tiffany Reece of Cove Creek, Donna Greene of Green Valley, Jenny McCourry of Hardin Park, Meghan Mixon of Mabel, Jamie Dale of Parkway, and Klay Anderson of Watauga High School.

Holste's selection as WCS Teacher of the Year was announced Friday morning in a surprise visit to Valle Crucis by a delegation that included her husband, daughter, and parents along with Board of Education members Barbara Kinsey, Ron Henries, and Brenda Reese. The team presenting the award also included Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Fonseca, Human Resources Director Dr. Stephen Martin, Testing Coordinator and former Valle Crucis Principal Dr. Wayne Eberle, and additional representatives of the school system's central office. Valle Crucis Principal Martha Clark was on a field trip with her 8th grade students but drove back from Charlotte to be present for the announcement.

Teachers of the Year are chosen at each school by their professional colleagues. Each Teacher of the Year has received a check for \$350 from the school system, a basket of small

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gifts donated by local businesses, and a framed certificate recognizing their selection. As Watauga County Schools Teacher of the Year, Holste will receive an additional \$350 from the school system.

The businesses contributing gifts for the Teachers of the Year include AFLAC and Lowell Younce, Bandana's Barbecue and Grill, Blue Ridge Vision, Chetola Resort, Chick-fil-A, Friendship Honda, Haircut 101, Hibbett Sports, Makoto's, Michaels, Omega Tees and Screenprinting, Panera Bread, Precision Printing, SageSport, Stick Boy, Cornerstone Bookstore, and Walgreens. "We are most grateful for the generous support of these businesses," said Dr. Martin. "Their contributions are valuable not just for the gifts themselves, but for the way they show that our community values education and that we want to reward excellence."

The WCS Teacher of the Year is chosen through a process that includes interviews with each candidate, a review of their written statements of teaching philosophy, and unannounced teacher observations in classrooms. The committee making the selection includes teachers, school administrators, and Watauga Board of Education member Barbara Kinsey.

In her statement of teaching philosophy, Holste stressed the importance of building strong relationships with students and of helping them "to grow academically, socially, and emotionally." Her emphasis on teaching the whole child is vividly reflected in her comments that "I do not teach a subject, I teach a human being who requires empathy and guidance...The greatest honor and reward I find in teaching is molding and guiding children towards being successful citizens."

Holste completed a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in reading education at Appalachian State University. She has also completed National Board Certification, the highest professional credential available in the teaching profession. She first worked for WCS in the afterschool program while still a student at ASU and began teaching in an interim position at Parkway School in 2006.

Valle Crucis School serves approximately 400 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. It is rated a School of Distinction and a school of high academic growth on the NC ABCs school accountability system.