**HISD celebrates 2016 Educators of the Year**

*May 20, 2016* — The Houston Independent School District on Friday paid tribute to the district’s top elementary and secondary teachers of the year during the fifth annual Educators of the Year banquet, which honors exceptional teachers and principals.

**Hillary Smith**, a fifth-grade reading teacher at DeAnda Elementary School, was named HISD Elementary Teacher of the Year, while **Christina Carter-Woods**, a seventh-grade reading teacher at Pershing Middle School, was named HISD Secondary Teacher of the Year.

Smith and Carter-Woods each received a $3,500 cash award and an engraved plaque. They also will advance to the state’s regional Teacher of the Year competition.

Smith, who is in her fourth year of teaching, attributes her success in the classroom to keeping it simple.

“All the great teachers I know focus on three simple things: their students, loving what they teach, and making a difference,” Smith wrote in her award application. “The core and purpose of public education is to groom social, productive, patriotic citizens. … In keeping my focus on the children I serve, I am well poised to deliver high quality instruction that is personally meaningful to each of my students. I give my students a degree of control in their educational experience in an effort to facilitate a lifelong love of learning. “

Carter-Woods, who has been an educator for 12 years, believes that showing love to her students by providing them with a nurturing and positive learning environment has been critical to her success.

“This year I made it a point to love on all my students — that includes loving their strengths, their weaknesses, and their parents,” Carter-Woods wrote in her award application. “An effective teacher does not simply teach and test the objectives. An effective teacher helps scholars understand, though they are only children, that they have an obligation to themselves to get better every day. In turn, they, the leaders and scholars, all grow together.”

Nearly 2,000 teachers from all 283 HISD schools attended the sold-out event sponsored by Cigna Health insurance. HISD Board of Education Trustee Wanda Adams thanked the teachers for being superheroes in HISD schools and classrooms.

“You make sacrifices to benefit your students, you never give up on them, you are an inspiring role model, and you are changing the world, one child at a time,” Adams said. “Thank you for always putting your students first, for dedicating your lives to education, and for committing yourselves to HISD.”

During the event, the district also honored its 2016 Beginning Teachers of the Year with a $3,500 cash award. The winners are **Morgan Greco** of Herod Elementary School, **Kapreece M. Smith** of Dowling Middle School, and **Elisa Michelle Infante** of Lamar High School. Other winners include Fondren Elementary School’s **Tracy W. Singleton**, who was presented with a $1,000 cash prize as part of the Emily Scott Evans Award, which is given to a third-grade teacher known for encouraging students to be excited about learning and to respect peers and adults.

“Your investment of time and energy in our children is the single most important factor in their success,” HISD Interim Superintendent Ken Huewitt told educators at the event. “You are on the front lines each and every day. You are not only teachers and principals, but also often a shoulder to cry on, a stand-in parental figure, and your students’ No. 1 fan and cheerleader.”

For the second year in a row, two teachers were honored with the Fan Favorite Award, which allows HISD staff, students, and alumni to vote for their favorite campus-based teacher of the year. More than 85,000 votes were submitted. **Jillean Herrera** of De Zavala Elementary School received this year’s Fan Favorite Award for elementary teachers while **ShaRell Martin** of Fleming Middle School received the Fan Favorite Award for secondary teachers.

Both elementary and secondary principals of the year, which were announced in February, also were recognized at the event. Bush Elementary School Principal **Theresa Rose** was named HISD’s Elementary Principal of the Year, and Lanier Principal **Felicia Adams** was selected as HISD’s Secondary Principal of the Year.

You can learn more about this year’s award finalists and winners by clicking [here](http://blogs.houstonisd.org/news/).

