



## **Cape May County American Sign Language Teacher Named New Jersey's Teacher of the Year for 2017-18**

**For Immediate Release**

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**Trenton, NJ** – Today, the New Jersey Department of Education announced that Amy T. Andersen, a high school American Sign Language (ASL) teacher at Ocean City High School in Cape May County, has been named the 2017-18 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

"I am excited to announce Amy T. Andersen as New Jersey's State Teacher of the Year and celebrate the life-changing impact she has had on her students and in her school," said Education Commissioner Kimberley Harrington, who introduced Amy at today's meeting of the State Board of Education. "Amy's dedication to her students, and how she teaches them to expand their perspectives and discover new ways to express themselves, will be shared throughout the state."

Amy, who was named the 2017-18 Cape May County Teacher of the Year last month, grew up in Cape May County. She earned a bachelor's degree in flute performance from Indiana University and a master's degree in deaf education from McDaniel College. Andersen also achieved national board certification in Exceptional Needs Specialist: Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

After nine years in Boston, Massachusetts as a teacher of the deaf, she returned to New Jersey in 2004 to raise a family. It was then, with 42 students, that Andersen began the ASL program at Ocean City High School. It has since grown to 130 students under her tutelage. Community oriented activities, such as ASL socials at local coffee shops and evening performances that raise funds for scholarships immerse students in deaf and hard of hearing culture helping them to build confidence. In the past three years alone, more than 85 percent of her students have achieved the New Jersey Seal of Biliteracy. Her popular and respected program has inspired a number of students to pursue ASL-related careers.

Amy began her career teaching deaf children to fall in love with reading, and now teaches hearing children to fall in love with ASL. She is a nationally recognized educator, who was named the Ocean City School District's 2014 ASL Teacher of the Year and was honored by the New Jersey Association for the Deaf and Atlantic County Society for the Deaf. In 2015, the television program "Classroom Close-Up NJ" highlighted her program after her students' ASL anti-bullying video went viral. As the 2016-17 Ocean City High School Teacher of the Year, Amy T. Andersen was featured in the New Jersey School Board Association's School Leader magazine and was recently honored by the National Liberty Museum with the Teacher as Hero: Exceptional Teacher Award.

"Students learn, through experience, that the deaf community is actually a culture. I find that my students experience a shift in perspective and gain more respect for the deaf, the more and more they work within the community," said Ms. Andersen. "My hope is that my students continue to apply this sense of empathy in all aspects of their lives. I know not all of my students will choose to make ASL a career, but I try to impart on them that no matter what they choose to do in the future, they should leave a positive mark on society. They have a unique path, a unique story, a voice that is valuable."

"Amy truly exemplifies the definition of a teacher by taking a holistic approach to teaching ASL to her students," said Dr. Kathleen Taylor, Superintendent of the Ocean City School District. "She values a quality education for all students and finds ways to engage them outside of her classroom walls through exciting ASL-related activities. Her enthusiasm, knowledge, and connectivity with both the hearing and deaf communities have opened up a whole new world to her students. As an inspiration to our community, Amy is making a real difference in the lives of students. We are just so proud of all of Amy's accomplishments and the impact she has on our students, school and community."

In her role as State Teacher of the Year, Amy T. Andersen will work closely with the New Jersey Department of Education, give presentations around the state and participate in national activities, including an opportunity to meet the President of the United States.

The six other finalists for the State Teacher of the Year were also recognized at today's State Board meeting. They achieved the highest scores on their written applications and videos, and then reported for an interview that consisted of a performance assessment and a question-and-answer session. They include: Mimma-Marie Cammarata, an Italian teacher at Sterling High School, Sterling; Kristy DeFazio, a fourth grade elementary school

teacher at James J. Flynn Elementary School, Perth Amboy; Nicole Petrosillo, an English Language Arts teacher at West Milford Township High School, West Milford Township; Diane Phares, an art teacher at Mount Olive High School, Mount Olive Township; Kristina Phelan, a kindergarten through second grade reading teacher at Mahala F. Atchison Elementary School, Tinton Falls; and Domenick Renzi, a basic skills mathematics teacher at Wedgwood Elementary School, Washington Township.

Additional information can be found on the [Governor's Educator of the Year webpage](#).