

Nominee: Cassy Whitley
Nominated by: Chris Veneris

I am writing to nominate Cassy Whitley for NCTAE Teacher of the year. It is rare that we as theatre educators get to see one of our colleagues from the eyes of a parent. It is that I am doubly sure there is no one more deserving of this award. Cassy is a highly effective educator who holds her students to a high standard. This does not make her harsh but effective.

I consider the three years that my child was in Cassy's class to be their saving grace and the only reason my child survived middle school. Cassy not only educates but forms a bond with her students that make them give their all, in class and in their productions. She can be the ear or the push that gives a child the confidence they need. Cassy is fair and does not play favorites in her program. Each student receives the same education and chance no matter who they are.

As a colleague, I have been blessed to have Cassy on the NCEdTA Board. She championed and pioneered the first ever Jr Thespian Festival in NC, all while bringing a troupe herself to the festival. Since the creation she has had double attendance from year one to two. Last year the festival grew again.

Cassy proves day in and day out that she cares about our profession, about her students, and about the future success of Theatre Education.

Nominee: Michaela Richards
Nominated by: Renae Hubbard

Mrs. Richards works at Glenn High School in Kernersville, NC and is part of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. She teaches all Theatre Arts levels, 1-4 Honors and Technical Theatre, for 9th-12th grades. Her department is also an active member of the International Thespian Society and part of the Rising STARS program. Glenn Drama also participates in our all-county theatre awards and scholarships program, the THETA awards, where her students won Best Play last year for the musical, "Little Women". This year, she is on the team of sponsors for THETA, and has already contributed many ideas and inspirations to support the amazing work of theatre students across the county. She supports her colleagues in Forsyth county in many ways, one of which is taking a group of her students to as many performances of the other schools as possible.

Michaela has been a member of NCTAE since she began teaching 8 years ago. She has been an advocate for the arts, and constantly explores how she can be an effective theatre educator for her students and for supporting her colleagues. She advises other theatre teachers in our county to belong to NCTAE and take advantage of fall sharing and winter sharing offerings. She is presently a "quieter" member, but I believe that she will be an effective NCTAE leader in the future.

She also has been working on the North Carolina's theatre arts curriculum team this summer, giving input and climbing through mounds of data to create a better curriculum for theatre arts. She has spent countless hours in Raleigh already and is continuing to work on this massive project, advocating for what is right for our theatre students and teachers.

Mrs. Richards has grown her program at Glenn High School in her short 8 years from a small, but driven program to a bustling, vigorous program with twice as many members as what she started with. Through her drive and passion, she is an outstanding mentor to her students. She leads with creativity and care, and always puts the students first in her decisions. She is truly a loving teacher that "goes to bat" for all her students, embracing diversity, and giving her students a "home". I was speaking to one of her students that came to watch our musical with a group. When I asked, "How is your musical going at Glenn?", the student simply replied, "Of course it's great, Mrs. Richards is there."

Michaela is also on many leadership teams at her school. Her colleagues only say good things about working with her, both at her school and across our county. She has also coached Glenn's school's dance team, managed the auditorium needs for her school, and hosted all-county events.

I highly recommend Michaela Richards as the NCTAE Educator of the Year due to her outstanding commitment to her students, theatre arts, NCTAE, and to our curriculum for the state. Her spirit and enthusiasm for what we do is infectious and inspiring.

Nominee: Lori Hilliard

Nominated by: Ellen Wharton

Lori Hilliard has been teaching in the Asheville/Buncombe Community for over 25 years. Her contagious enthusiasm has been shared with students from grades 5 through 12, educating them about the wonderful world of theatre and how they may use their own drama in a positive manner. Using 21st Century skills through creative dramatics and group work, Lori strives to advocate for theatre in schools as a necessity in helping solidify and advocate for a well rounded education.

Lori's skills go beyond the classroom. She is also an example of high standards in community and professional theaters in the Asheville setting. She has served on the board of Asheville Community Theatre and North Carolina Stage Company, as well as directing and performing and organizing community outreach. She has been responsible for grant writing and fundraising for the Asheville theatrical community. She even finds time to continue her acting as a professional voice over actor.

As a lifelong learning teacher, she is eager to share his knowledge and experience with students and fellow teachers alike. She is a recurring participant in NCTAE's Fall Sharing and Winter Focus as well as an active member of EdTA. She is currently serving as secretary of NCTAE. Lori is quite impressive in her theatrical talents, but more than that, as a friend. She has been a constant support, always encouraging me to never give up. Even through her own battles with cancer, she demonstrated courage and strength to her students, community and friends.

Lori's passion for the profession is inspirational and infectious, while her positive outlook lightens the tough road ahead. From classroom to community to state levels, Lori is a fine example of what theatre arts education is about.