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Eight Teachers in the Running for 2012 Virginia Teacher of the Year *Commonwealth's Top Teacher to be Named Next Month*

Eight educators learned of their selection today as 2012 Virginia Regional Teachers of the Year during surprise classroom visits and announcements made by their division superintendents.

"These educators exemplify what is best in Virginia's public school teachers," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright. "Each day they motivate, challenge and encourage their students to excel, and, in doing so, effect academic success in the classroom."

The 2012 Regional Teachers of the Year announced are as follows:

- Jamie B. Mullenau, a fifth-grade teacher at Mechanicsville Elementary in Hanover County (Region 1)
- Thomas A. Shenk, a physical education teacher at John Tyler Elementary in Portsmouth (Region 2)
- Lori G. Askew, a special education teacher at Bowling Green Elementary in Caroline County (Region 3)
- Jamie B. Sawatzky, a seventh-grade history teacher at Rocky Run Middle in Fairfax County (Region 4)
- Margaret A. "Meg" Smith, an eighth-grade English literature teacher at Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle School for Innovation in Lynchburg (Region 5)
- Carol L. Webster, a theater arts instructor at Burton Center for Arts and Technology and 10th-grade English teacher at William Byrd High in Roanoke County (Region 6)
- Tiffany D. Carter, a fifth-grade mathematics, science and US History teacher at Bland Elementary in Bland County (Region 7)
- Rachel B. Johnson, a Title 1 reading and mathematics teacher at LaCrosse Elementary in Mecklenburg County (Region 8)

The teachers were selected from among candidates nominated by school divisions in each of the state's eight administrative regions. The candidates submitted portfolios highlighting their accomplishments, educational philosophies and community activities. A panel, including classroom teachers, representatives of professional and educational associations, the business community and 2011 Virginia Teacher of the Year LaTonya E. Waller of Richmond reviewed the portfolios — and letters of recommendation from divisions, colleagues and supporters — and selected the eight regional teachers of the year.

The panel will interview each of the eight teachers next month to select the 2012 Virginia Teacher of the Year. The decision will be announced during an awards ceremony October 14 in Richmond.

The 2012 Virginia Teacher of the Year will be the commonwealth's nominee in the National Teacher of the Year Program. The recognition is given by the Council of Chief State School Officers, in partnership with the University of Phoenix and People to People Ambassador Programs, and sponsored by the ING Foundation and Target. Two previous Virginia teachers — B. Philip Bigler, the 1998 Virginia Teacher of the Year, and Mary V. Bicouvaris, the 1989 Virginia Teacher of the Year — went on to be named as a National Teacher of the Year.