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**Oak Park's Swezey named district's 2019 Teacher of the Year
*Alumni of Distinction and Ignite Innovation Teacher awards also announced***

Sarasota, Fla. (Dec. 13, 2018) – Shane Swezey, a music teacher at Oak Park School, was named the 2019 Sarasota County Teacher of the Year at the Dec. 12 Ignite Education celebration hosted by the Education Foundation of Sarasota County.

Sarasota County Schools' Superintendent, Dr. Todd Bowden, made the announcement to a crowd of over 330 guests, thanking all 44 nominees for the work they do in their classrooms each and every day.

Swezey will represent district educators at events throughout the 2019 calendar year and will serve as the district's nominee for state Teacher of the Year. His fellow finalists, Tessa Healy, of Wilkinson Elementary School, and Ashlee Middleton, of Sarasota High School, also were honored onstage at the annual awards ceremony, and 41 Teacher of the Year designees representing local schools were recognized.

Swezey has provided music education and therapy services to students ages 5 to 22 at Oak Park School, the district's center school for special needs, since 2013. He originally studied aerospace engineering at Florida State University but a change of heart led him to pursue a bachelor's degree in music therapy and later a master's in music from the University of Kentucky. He is a board-certified music therapist and earned his teaching certification from State College of Florida.

"Music is an engaging, motivating and accessible medium that I can use to buttress the communication, motor, social-emotional and unique academic goals my students have," Swezey said.

As a staunch advocate for students with special needs, Swezey encourages building on students' abilities instead of dwelling so much on disabilities.

Known for being able to quickly build rapport and engage with children, Swezey uses highly creative methods to motivate students and encourage learning gains such as increasing eye contact and interacting with peers.

“It’s an honor and a privilege just to be recognized and more importantly, for Oak Park School to be recognized,” Swezey shared while accepting his award. “A lot of great things happen in that school every day and many don’t know about them.”

“Whether you’re a student, teacher, principal, successful business person or stay-at-home mom,” he continued. “Don’t forget to look around and love those you see every day because it can make an eternal difference.”

The Education Foundation presented Swezey with a \$2,500 cash award and Healy and Middleton with cash awards of \$1,250 each. Sunset Automotive Group sponsored the cash awards.

The Ignite Innovation award was given to Todd Brown, civics teacher at Sarasota Military Academy Prep. The award recognizes a Teacher of the Year who is creative in their approach, willing to think outside the box and able to connect students with learning in unique ways.

Brown, who has a doctorate in computational sociology, creates experiential learning opportunities in his classes and was creator of The Inspire Project, a lecture/presentation series about student leadership-based initiatives of local and global impact.

“What drives me to do what I do is human connection and trying to open the eyes of our students to what’s out there in the world,” Brown said while accepting his award.

Sarasota attorney Dan Bailey received the Alumni of Distinction award that honors a graduate of Sarasota County Schools who has distinguished themselves in their field and in community service. Bailey, a sixth-generation Floridian who graduated from Sarasota High School in 1964, is a partner in the Williams Parker firm. He is a civic and community leader who has received numerous awards for his leadership and involvement in charitable organizations.

While accepting his award, Bailey shared, “I am very proud of all of our schools and the hard work they do. Our teachers are the heroes of this community.”

Jennifer Vigne, president of the Education Foundation, thanked teachers in closing remarks: “Your dedication for your profession, love for your students and pride in your schools are incredibly admirable qualities. You truly go the distance every day, and it is our hope that our community continues to recognize your value and lift you up.”

This year’s Ignite Education awards ceremony, held at Art Ovation in Sarasota, was hosted by the Education Foundation of Sarasota County and produced in partnership with the Sarasota County School District.

About the Teacher of the Year Program

The Teacher of the Year program is produced by the Education Foundation of Sarasota County in partnership with Sarasota County Schools and is made possible through the funding and support of many corporate and community partners. Each of the three finalists will receive a cash award from the Education Foundation.

About the Education Foundation of Sarasota County

The Education Foundation of Sarasota County is an independent partner working to advance philanthropic support for Sarasota County Schools. Its mission is to enhance the potential of students, promote excellence in teaching and inspire innovation in education. Guided by the belief that education changes lives, the Education Foundation strives to match each donor's passion with high-impact projects created to ensure students graduate with purpose and are prepared for a postsecondary pathway. The Education Foundation of Sarasota County and its philanthropic investors are champions for students, teachers and schools. For more information on how to be a champion for education, visit EdFoundationSRQ.org.

About Sarasota County Schools

Sarasota County Schools is committed to providing unrivaled academic, emotional and civic growth to every student, every day. As one of the leading employers on the Suncoast, Sarasota County Schools boasts 53 schools that expertly cater to the diverse needs of over 43,000 students. We are one of two Florida school districts to consistently earn an A-grade every year since 2004. Our passionate educators empower students to take charge of their academic and personal success, a practice we believe fosters lifelong growth and achievement. We actively maintain the district's tradition of excellence and ensure that tradition extends to all students. Our commitment to our students extends beyond graduation to make sure they not only graduate on time but do so college and career ready. Want to take your student's education to the next level? Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#), or visit www.SarasotaCountySchools.net.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS (Please include this credit: Photos by Cliff Roles)

1. 2019 Sarasota County Teacher of the Year Shane Swezey with Education Foundation President Jennifer Vigne and Sarasota County Schools Superintendent Dr. Todd Bowden.
2. 2018 Alumnus of Distinction James Tollerton presents 2019 Ignite Education Alumni of Distinction award to Dan Bailey, graduate of Sarasota High School Class of 1964.
3. Robb Wolf, 2018 Ignite Innovation award recipient passes the torch to 2019 Ignite Innovation award recipient, Todd Brown of Sarasota Military Academy Prep.