



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Mullen Science Teacher Named Nebraska Teacher of the Year

***Editor's Note: Photos and video of the Nebraska Teacher of the Year and Award of Excellence winners are available using the following link.***

<https://adobe.ly/463rmh8>

Sarah Hardin, a high school science teacher at Mullen Public Schools was named the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year during a surprise award presentation today.

Nebraska Commissioner of Education Brian Maher presented the award.

Hardin was one of four finalists for the Nebraska Teacher of the Year award. Lori Pflaster of Sandoz Elementary in Lexington, Katie Czerwiec of Beveridge Middle School in Omaha, and Keaira Watson of King Elementary in Omaha were also finalists and will be recognized as Award of Excellence winners.

Hardin has been a teacher since 2007, working her entire career in Mullen, teaching science, math, agriculture and physical education.

In the classroom, Hardin strives to get her students involved and excited with hands-on, project-based learning. Whether it is through guest speakers, community service projects, or building complex machines, her students have a chance to not just learn but live the lessons. She is currently leading the development of a geothermal greenhouse to engage in even more real-world issues.

"I believe that real learning happens when students are doing, not just listening; that equity must be built into every instructional choice; and that curiosity and creativity are essential to scientific thinking," Hardin wrote in her application. "My role is to ignite that curiosity, guide discovery, and make sure every student sees themselves as capable of deep understanding and innovation."

As the 2026 Teacher of the Year, Hardin wants to inspire both students and teachers to be excited about learning. She believes learning must go beyond memorizing facts and formulas and should spark curiosity, encourage hands-on exploration, and connect to students' diverse experiences and interests.

"I believe it is our job as educators to tap into our students' passions and design lessons that make those subjects relevant and meaningful," wrote Hardin. "Science education should be active, fun, and will empower students of all backgrounds to

see themselves as thinkers, creators, and problem-solvers.”

Hardin has been a teacher for 18 years and earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Nebraska. She was a banker in Mullen before being asked to consider teaching by the superintendent when a vacancy opened. Hardin went through a teacher transition program and earned her teaching certificate while working for Mullen Public Schools. She is also active in her community as the president of the local education association and a volunteer EMT.

A panel of Nebraska educators selected Hardin as the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. The Teacher of the Year program recognizes the contributions of classroom teachers who are exceptionally dedicated, knowledgeable, skilled, and who have the ability to inspire students of all backgrounds and abilities to learn.

Hardin, Pflaster, Czerwec, and Watson will all be honored by the Nebraska State Board of Education at a reception in December.

Hardin will also participate in the National Teacher of the Year competition later this year.

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