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## Evers names four Wisconsin Teachers of the Year in surprise ceremonies

*Herb Kohl Educational Foundation gives \$3,000 to each honoree*

MADISON — “I’m here because you have an excellent educator in your midst,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers as he kicked off the school year by making surprise announcements of four Wisconsin Teachers of the Year in four communities across the state.

The educators, all previous recipients of Herb Kohl Educational Foundation Teacher Fellowship awards, will receive an unrestricted \$3,000 award from the foundation for being named a Teacher of the Year. The foundation, through its student and educator recognition programs, has awarded \$11.95 million to Wisconsin educators, students, and schools through August of this year.

“Each year, thanks to the generosity of Former Senator Herb Kohl and his foundation, we recognize educators who go the extra mile for their kids,” Evers said. “This is challenging because our schools are filled with teachers that are worthy of this award.”

Wisconsin’s four Teachers of the Year for the 2016-17 school year are

**Sarah Breckley**, a high school world languages (Spanish) teacher at Reedsburg Area High School in the Reedsburg School District, High School Teacher of the Year;

**Pamela Gresser** of Hatley, a fifth-grade teacher at Rothschild Elementary School in the D.C. Everest Area School District, Elementary School Teacher of the Year;

**Chris Gleason**, a band director and instrumental music teacher at Patrick Marsh Middle School in the Sun Prairie Area School District, Middle School Teacher of the Year; and

**Barbara VanDoorn** of Tony, a 4K-12 school counselor at Lake Holcombe School in the Lake Holcombe School District, Special Services Teacher of the Year.

A panel of educators, parents, and community leaders selected the four Teachers of the Year from a pool of 86 public school Kohl Teacher Fellows who were named in spring 2016. Kohl Teacher Fellows, nominated by colleagues, parents, students, or members of their community, are chosen for their ability to inspire students’ love of learning, instructional innovation and leadership, and commitment to community involvement.

“The Teacher of the Year program highlights the many contributions educators make to our children, schools, and communities,” said Herb Kohl, philanthropist and businessman, who co-sponsors the Wisconsin

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Teacher of the Year program through his educational foundation. “They are leaders who put forth extraordinary effort to help all children achieve.”

### **High School Teacher of the Year**

[Sarah Breckley](#), a Spanish language teacher at Reedsburg Area High School in the Reedsburg School District, helps her students master the language through innovative lessons that incorporate dance, filmmaking, improvisational acting, debate, Skyping with native speakers, and even creating fashion shows. She also leads immersive language trips that feature homestays outside of the United States to give her students authentic opportunities to apply their learning while broadening their perspectives. She says that a student’s time in her class “must give purpose to language learning, value to different cultures, and hope for the future.” Breckley brings her own experiences as a world traveler into the classroom to open doors for students and to show what is possible in the world. She has planted medicinal gardens in Costa Rica and spent four months in Spain as an English teaching assistant for a local school and a volunteer in a Sevilla soup kitchen.

Breckley is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she earned her bachelor’s degree in Spanish and the University of Wisconsin-Stout, where she earned her master’s degree in education.

### **Elementary School Teacher of the Year**

[Pamela Gresser](#) of Hatley, a fifth-grade teacher at Rothschild Elementary School in the D.C. Everest Area School District, creates an environment where all students, staff, and families experience strong feelings of safety, belonging, and respect. She has served as the building’s Positive Behavior Intervention Support coach for five years, focusing on strengthening bonds between families and the school. She also coordinated schoolwide celebrations, tracked behavioral data, and in doing so, facilitated a significant increase in parent and teacher conference attendance. Gresser leads trainings for Love and Logic, and has used Love and Logic to develop collaborative groups and a unique Recovery Process for students. Gresser also inspires students and families through her volunteer work in and out of the school. She started a Student Leadership Team at Rothschild Elementary to perform student-led volunteer work in the community, and she partners with Izzy, her certified therapy dog, to visit the Rothschild Public Library to give children in the community who are learning to read the opportunity to read to Izzy.

Gresser received her Bachelor’s in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and earned her Master’s Degree in Education from Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

### **Middle School Teacher of the Year**

[Chris Gleason](#), a band director and instrumental music teacher at Patrick Marsh Middle School in the Sun Prairie Area School District, inspires his students to do something many music students don’t do, practice at home. “Chris’s students practice because they understand why it helps, how their brain actually functions and because they have a teacher that holds them in such high regard that he bothered to teach them about the latest in brain research,” said a teacher in a letter of recommendation. A special project Gleason started in 2009, *ComMission Possible*, has student musicians collaborating with nationally renowned composers to write a commissioned piece of music for middle school band students. Gleason believes in the power of connecting music to civic pride, getting his students out into the community through smaller ensembles that perform at local events and larger performances at Sun Prairie’s senior care homes, the American Family Insurance Holiday Breakfast, and in the Memorial Day parade. His middle school bands have twice been chosen to perform at the Capitol Rotunda for Music in our Schools month.

Gleason is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with a bachelor’s degree in Music Education and a master’s degree in Professional Development from UW-La Crosse.

### **Special Services Teacher of the Year**

[Barbara VanDoorn](#) of Tony, a 4K-12 school counselor at Lake Holcombe School in the Lake Holcombe School District, anchors her educational philosophy in the importance of showing respect, demonstrating caring, and recognizing the intelligence of individuals. “As educators, it is our job to identify the strengths and needs of each student. The counselor’s role is to take it one step further — advocating for each student in the classroom, the community, and in realizing each student’s future goals,” she said. VanDoorn looks at the K-12 experience as a long

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pathway of personal growth that includes opportunities for students to engage in meaningful community service. She pairs high school basketball players with first- and second-grade reading buddies; middle school students build a cardboard “shanty town” and sleep in it for a night as part of a Habitat for Humanity fundraiser. VanDoorn sees opportunities to provide mental health support to her rural community through her certification as a Mental Health First Aid Instructor. Her vision is to share the principles of mental health first aid as commonly as CPR training. She sees great promise in teaching youth, teachers, bus drivers, administrators, and parents how to access the tools they need to provide mental health support when it is needed the most.

VanDoorn graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a bachelor’s degree in Child Development and Family Life, and earned her Master’s of Education in Guidance and Counseling from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.

Evers will honor each Teacher of the Year during the Sept. 15 State of Education address and awards program at the State Capitol in Madison. Later this fall, a committee will select one of the four Teachers of the Year to represent Wisconsin in the National Teacher of the Year program. That individual will receive an additional \$6,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation. Nominations for the Kohl Teacher Fellowship program are open until Sept. 23. Visit the [Herb Kohl Educational Foundation](http://www.kohleducation.org/) website, <http://www.kohleducation.org/>, to nominate a teacher.

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**NOTES:** More information about each Teacher of the Year can be found in individualized news releases linked from this document or on the [Department of Public Instruction news release website](http://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases), <http://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases>. This news release is available electronically at [http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2016\\_86.pdf](http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2016_86.pdf).