

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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[Media Files](#)

Spartanburg Science Center announces 2023 Finalists for Inaugural Spartanburg County STEM Educator of the Year Awards, October 5th at the Chapman Cultural Center

Spartanburg, SC - As Spartanburg County welcomes teachers back to school, the Spartanburg Science Center surprised seven educators with news that they were the district finalists for the inaugural [STEM Educator of the Year Awards](#) celebrating the creativity, perseverance, and fortitude of our K-12 public school educators in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math - as part of the Center's 45th Anniversary.

Educators were nominated by peers, administrators, students and community members this past Spring, and a blind judging process took place over the summer with representatives from Milliken, Contec, Park National Bank, Wofford and Converse. The seven finalists are in the running for the STEM Educator of the Year who will be announced during the Science Center's 45th Anniversary Celebration on October 5th at Chapman Cultural Center where the awards ceremony will take place. Each teacher will receive a check for \$2,500 and professional development opportunities from the Center, and the countywide winner will receive an additional \$2,500.

"As part of our 45th Anniversary, the Spartanburg Science Center is thrilled to launch the inaugural Spartanburg STEM Educator of the Year Awards," stated Mary Levens, Executive Director of the Spartanburg Science Center. *"As a former public school science teacher who worked in Spartanburg County for over 40 years, I understand how challenging this role can be. This award is for teachers who are making a significant difference in the lives of students across the county by providing excellent curriculum, encouraging lifelong learning, and inspiring a passion for STEM beyond the classroom."*

The STEM Educator of the Year Finalists include:

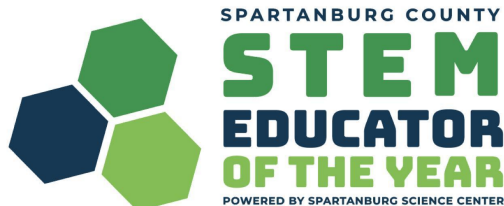
District 1: – Rhonda Henson, Holly Springs Motlow Elementary

"If selected as the 2023 SC STEM Educator of the Year, my platform would be to bring the excitement of hands-on learning and application of STEM to more students to increase their problem-solving and teamwork skills. This can benefit many aspects of students' lives and the lives of others around them."

District 2: – Tara Burgess, Rainbow Lake Middle School

This year I have had the pleasure of welcoming many students with different interests, levels, backgrounds, and varying degrees of experience in STEM. It is my belief that STEM courses only become stronger when the classroom becomes more diverse. It is only through diversity that different opinions may be shared. When different opinions are shared there is the opportunity for discourse, debate, honest communication, and true learning."





District 3: – Tonya McCullough, Cannons Elementary School

“If selected as the 2023 SC STEM Educator of the Year my platform would be focused on integrating STEM education in every elementary school to inspire children at a young age to want to pursue a career in STEM and nurture their creative thinking skills.”

District 4: – Kelly Dixon, Woodruff High School

“If selected, my platform would be Full STEM Ahead. My goal would be to help nurture the transition between book learning and practical application of STEM concepts through the use of hands on, engaging, and kinetic activities.”

District 5: – Kelly, Jewitt, James F. Byrnes High School

“My platform would be recruiting and retaining STEM educators, including alternatively certified STEM teachers. We have a tremendous teacher shortage in the United States, and South Carolina is not immune to this.”

District 6: – Kayla Short, Fairforest Middle School

“I firmly believe that incorporating project-based learning into STEAM education programs can effectively enhance students' learning experiences, which is why I chose this as my platform. By offering contextualized and authentic experiences, PBL can scaffold students' learning and build powerful STEAM concepts.”

District 7: – Susan Turner, Spartanburg High School

“My platform is to close the engagement gap of all students in STEM education. I want to encourage educators to create classroom environments that meet students where they are by adapting science instruction that fosters scientific student-driven discourse, supportive mentors from STEM professionals, and confidence in pursuing STEM related careers.”

In addition to celebrating educators during the event on October 5th, the Science Center will be honoring Jack McBride, CEO of Contec Inc. for his commitment to STEM in Spartanburg, and presenting the Inaugural John F. Green Award for Student Excellence in STEM. Tickets are on sale for the event October 5th on the Science Center website, and Spartanburg County Educators will receive a [discounted ticket](#).

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About the Spartanburg Science Center: For 45 years The John F. Green Spartanburg Science Center has remained the premier STEM educational resource for educators, parents and students in Spartanburg County. The Center and its staff strives to inspire excitement for science through interactive exhibits, live animals and hands-on programs at an affordable cost. During a typical year the Science Center team conducts over 500 educational programs, which serve more than 20,000+ children in all seven school districts in Spartanburg County. The Center supports STEM learning for students, teachers, and after school clubs. Learn more at spartanburgsciencecenter.org.