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Mercer County Educator is 2001-02 Teacher of the Year

Janet Wilson, an art teacher and chairperson of the Art Department at Nottingham High School, Hamilton Township, Mercer County, has been selected as the 2001-02 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year. Wilson was introduced to the board today at its monthly meeting.

"Janet Wilson is committed to helping all of her students realize their dreams," said Commissioner of Education Vito A. Gagliardi, Sr. "Through her own personal experience, she understands what a difference a dedicated teacher can make in encouraging a student to fulfill her dream.

"Each year, New Jersey's participation in the Teacher of the Year Program helps bring honor and recognition to many talented classroom professionals who are selected at the school, district and county levels," Gagliardi continued. "I hope that all of the teachers who participated in this year's program will continue to serve as inspirational figures in the lives of their students and the careers of their colleagues."

Wilson was motivated at an early age to become a teacher by her mother, who was then a fifth grade teacher. Although she was strongly interested in art, she carried a secret desire to become an art teacher and pursued instead a career in elementary education.

Finally, in the spring of her senior year of college, one of her professors asked her why she hadn't been an art major because she had such an obvious love of art. "She found it hard to believe that no one had encouraged me in the direction of my dream," she said of her teacher. "A teacher changed my destiny that afternoon in college. Learning to know each student in order to know their unspoken dreams has remained one of the constant challenges throughout my career."

At the core of Wilson's philosophy of teaching is the belief that all children have the right to equal educational opportunities. "I must respond with encouragement to all students whether they are putting pen to paper for the first time or winning a highly coveted award," she said.

Wilson is a strong proponent of the arts. "The arts are a vehicle that encourages students toward self-reflection and a respect for the power to creativity. All students must be brought in to share the wealth afforded to all of us by the arts." To illustrate, she quoted George Bernard Shaw, who wrote: "You use a glass mirror to see your face; you use the arts to see your soul."

One of Wilson's current students has high praise for Wilson. In written recommendation, Heli Ojamaa wrote, "It has been both a pleasure and an honor to be a pupil of Jan Wilson. She has done far beyond what is required of her in order to provide the best educational experience for her students and for all of the students of the district. It is teachers like her that really care and make a difference in people's lives that truly deserve to be recognized for all of their efforts and hard work."

Janet Wilson is a 30-year career educator. She began her career as chairperson of the Fine Arts Department at Notre Dame High School, Lawrenceville, in 1971. She joined the Hamilton Township Public Schools in 1977 and has held a variety of positions at the elementary and high school level. She has served Nottingham High School in her current position since 1996.

Wilson earned her bachelors degree in elementary education from the College of St. Elizabeth and her masters degree from Georgian Court College. She has completed some post-graduate work at St. Peters College.

Wilson, a resident of Hamilton, is a member of several professional organizations, including her local, county and state education associations, the Art Educators of New Jersey, the National Art Education Association, the American Guild of Crafts, the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Phi Delta Kappa and the Association of American University Women. At Nottingham High School, she has chaired the Star School Committee and has been a member of the Middle States Steering Committee, the Post Prom Committee, and P.A.S.T.A. (Parents Association Supporting Theater Arts).

She has also served on the Visual Arts Committee for the High School Proficiency Assessment and the Test

Revision Committee of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

As New Jersey Teacher of the Year, Wilson will be asked to be an advocate and role model for the teaching profession and will speak on behalf of the teachers of New Jersey. She will also represent New Jersey in the national Teacher of the Year competition, which is cosponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and Scholastic, Inc. The national winner will be announced in April 2002.

Wilson will be New Jersey's first Teacher of the Year to be granted a half-year paid sabbatical. Educational Testing Service will sponsor the sabbatical from January to June 2002, allowing her to participate full-time in activities promoting the teaching profession.

The Department of Education will provide Wilson with a laptop computer and will reimburse her for her travel costs. The department will also reimburse her school district for the cost of hiring substitute teachers through December. At the request of the New Jersey Education Association, Saturn Retailers of New Jersey have unanimously agreed to provide a Saturn for Wilson's use. NJEA will provide her with a fax machine.

A panel of judges representing the state's education associations selected Wilson. The panel reviewed the applications of the 21 county teachers of the year and interviewed six finalists before deciding on Wilson.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS: [Attached is a list of the 2001-02 County Teachers of the Year.](#)