



NEWS RELEASE

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Eugene Educator Named 2019 Oregon Teacher of the Year

Pilgrim Ricker honored for exciting students about science and health-related careers

(Eugene, Ore.) – In a surprise assembly today, Churchill High School Health Occupations educator Keri Pilgrim Ricker was named Oregon’s 2019 Teacher of the Year. Director of the Oregon Department of Education Colt Gill was joined by Governor Kate Brown, Eugene School District Superintendent Gustavo Balderas and Churchill High Principal Greg Borgerding in honoring Pilgrim Ricker for her passionate leadership and tireless advocacy for students.

“Education gives our students the ability to create their own futures, and we need to give students the tools to match their determination and hard work,” said Governor Kate Brown. “More time with great teachers, like Keri, is key to helping every student make the connection between classroom and career, and graduate high school with a plan for their future and the skills to make it a reality.”

Pilgrim Ricker has spent 10 years in the classroom. With a background in biology, ecology and animal science, Pilgrim Ricker guides her students through customized curriculum rooted in inquiry and real-world application. In an effort to promote more diverse and equitable representation in science, engineering, technology and math (STEM), Pilgrim Ricker focused on Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming in 2014 and received her endorsement in CTE Health Services. As the lead of Churchill High’s Health Services Pathway, she works to maintain a collaborative network of healthcare professionals, non-profit organizations, post-secondary institutions and families to create dynamic healthcare simulation units aligned to her students’ career interests.

“The need for career-connected experiences for students in Oregon cannot be overstated,” said Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education. “The relevance and rigor of content demonstrated in Keri’s classroom is a model of excellence for CTE in Oregon and I look forward to Keri spreading that message across the state as Oregon’s 2019 Teacher of the Year.”

Beyond biological diversity, Pilgrim Ricker’s classroom is focused on diversity of thought, ideas, people and narratives. “When students feel the need to discuss a topic I hold that space,” said Pilgrim Ricker. “We agree to listen, stay present, accept discomfort, speak our truths and accept non-closure. It is not always easy, but we must model civil discourse and provide students an opportunity for practice so they can navigate the workplace and the world responsibly and with empathy.”



For Pilgrim Ricker, collaboration is essential for educational transformation. “I believe education to be a partnership formed between students, educators and the community,” said Pilgrim Ricker. “We all must take a seat at the table and support one another in meaningful ways to create a sustainable, holistic and dynamic educational model.”

The Oregon Teacher of the Year program is sponsored by the Oregon Department of Education in partnership with the Oregon Lottery. Pilgrim Ricker was awarded \$500 as a 2019 Regional Teacher of the Year in May, and receives a \$5,000 cash award as 2019 Oregon Teacher of the Year. A matching \$5,000 is also awarded to Churchill High School.

The Oregon Teacher of the Year is selected after an extensive application process. Nominees from schools throughout Oregon submitted packets of information including testimonials and letters of support from administrators, students and colleagues. From the written material, applicants were assessed on leadership, instructional expertise, community involvement, understanding of educational issues, professional development and vision.

As the 2019 Oregon Teacher of the Year, Pilgrim Ricker will serve as a spokesperson and representative for all Oregon teachers. She will attend the Washington Recognition Week for Teachers of the Year in Washington, D.C. this spring, where she will meet the President and the U.S. Secretary of Education.

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