

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Suzette Gomez-Smith Is St.Thomas-St.John District 2016 Teacher Of The Year

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ST. THOMAS -- Following an extensive selection process and weeks of anticipation, on Sunday, Oct. 18 longtime E. Benjamin Oliver Elementary teacher Suzette Gomez-Smith was named the St. Thomas-St. John District 2016 Teacher of the Year at a selection luncheon themed "Hats Off to Our Educators" held at the Marriott Frenchman's Reef Resort, a press release the Department of Education issued late Sunday revealed.

The affair was attended by District personnel, teachers, family, friends and well-wishers, many of whom donned exquisite headwear in celebration of the honorees.

Mrs. Gomez-Smith was among four nominees in line for the prestigious annual recognition, which, for the first time this year, involved more than submitting a written application, according to Superintendent Dionne Wells-Hedrington.

"The applicants completed their normal applications that came from the U.S. Department of Education, but in addition to that, I had a panel of five that went out and conducted classroom observations," she explained. "They had a checklist, a rubric that they all used and visited the teachers' classrooms during particular class periods to rate the teachers' written application with principal



Nominees pose with 2016 Teacher

of the Year. (L to R) Monika Szczepaniak-Emeran, Joycelyn Bryan-Ledee, Suzette Gomez-Smith and Antis George-Birmingham

A video montage was shown of each teacher in her classroom, and Mrs. Gomez-Smith was praised for her creativity and commitment to her students over the 29 years she has spent at E. Benjamin Oliver. During her remarks, Mrs. Gomez-Smith noted the ways in which classroom instruction has changed since she began teaching in 1986, and said her passion for seeing students succeed motivates her and her colleagues to keep "coming back for more."

Sharing the stage and the spotlight with Mrs. Gomez-Smith were Antis George-Birmingham, English Teacher at Charlotte Amalie High School since 1989. She is also a member of the American Federation of Teachers and the celebrated award-winning coach of the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts' 'Poetry Out Loud' competition; Joycelyn Bryan-Ledee has been an Elementary Teacher at Joseph Sibilly Elementary since 2011, where she also serves as the school's eSIP chairperson; and Monika Szczepaniak-Emeran, originally from Poland, is a French Teacher and the Foreign Languages Chairperson at the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School since 2014. She joined the Department of Education in 2007 as a French Teacher at Addelita Cancryn Jr. High.

Jeune Provost, the 2015 District and State Teacher of the Year, reflected on her year-long tenure in both roles and offered her support to Mrs. Gomez-Smith.

"Having the recognition was amazing for me and I just love what happened today, to see those teachers so happy and embracing their moment," she said. "I also understand the

gravity and the weight of this responsibility. I look forward to helping Mrs. Gomez-Smith transition to use this platform as a way to bring other teachers into collaboration and foster creativity in the classroom.”

As District Teacher of the Year, Provost said Gomez-Smith will be afforded the opportunity to learn much about public education from the policymaking level by being a part of various taskforces and committees. Additionally, if Gomez-Smith is named State Teacher of the Year, she will travel to Washington, D.C. to meet President Obama, among other involvements.

The winner and nominees each received a host of gift items, including electronics, a plaque, a bouquet of flowers and other tokens of appreciation from colleagues, family members, friends and students attending Sunday’s ceremony. In order to identify the State Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Gomez-Smith will next compete against the 2016 St. Croix District Teacher of the Year, who will be announced at a ceremony on St. Croix on October 24.

The newly organized Ivanna Eudora Kean Music Styles jazz ensemble, under the direction of Music Department Chairperson Dionne Donadelle, provided the afternoon’s entertainment.

Feature Image: STTJ District 2016 Teacher of the Year Suzette Gomez-Smith.

Image Credit: Department of Education.