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College of Education Mentor Lands Highest U.S. Math/Science Teaching Award

Winthrop University

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College of Education Mentor Lands Highest U.S. Math/Science Teaching Award

Quick Facts

- Gail Vawter is a seventh-grade science teacher at Springfield Middle School in Fort Mill.
- She has taught for more than 30 years.



ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — Since 1983, nearly 4,500 United States teachers have been recognized with the **Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST)**, considered the highest honor for teachers in these fields.

Gail Vawter, an adjunct professor in **Winthrop University's Richard W. Riley College of Education**, is now one of those esteemed teachers.

Vawter represented South Carolina in the science award category, winning \$10,000 and a trip to Washington, D.C.

Vawter, a seventh-grade teacher at Springfield Middle School in Fort Mill, has taught science for 30 years, including 19 years at the middle-school level. Her husband, David, is an associate professor at Winthrop.

In addition to her teaching duties, Vawter has served as a mentor teacher and partner school liaison to the College of Education, teaching students how to develop and implement inquiry in the classroom.

The award represents a case of "if at first you don't succeed, try again": Vawter had been nominated for the award previously, but hadn't won.

"It has been a process of failure and success," she said. "When I didn't win before, I got scores from the judges showing where I needed to improve. I took those suggestions seriously and did what they mentioned and more. It seemed to pay off the second time."

Vawter told PAEMST officials she was honored and expressed her passion for both her students and science.

"This award represents how important STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) is to the intellectual growth of our students and the impact they will have on the world of tomorrow," she said. "I would be thrilled to join the 4,400 teachers that have been honored with this award and form an extensive network of sharing and collaboration. This is a tribute to all of my students, colleagues and family."

Vawter and her husband kept her win a secret for an entire month until they traveled to Washington, D.C., to accept the award. She said they enjoyed their time in the nation's capital.

For more information, contact **Nicole Chisari**, communications coordinator, at chisarin@winthrop.edu or 803/323-2236.

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