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Critchfield Names Lewiston Educator 2025 Idaho Teacher of the Year

(BOISE) – Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield was joined by staff and students at Orchards Elementary School in Lewiston to recognize third grade teacher Heidi Cornell as Idaho’s 2025 Teacher of the Year.

The Idaho Teacher of the Year program, in partnership with CapEd Credit Union, raises the profile of Idaho’s top teaching talent by nominating an educator to serve as spokesperson and representative for Idaho at a variety of local and national events. Cornell was chosen from a pool of 40 applicants.

In addition to being Idaho’s nominee for National Teacher of the Year, Cornell received a commemorative plaque and a check for \$10,000.

“Heidi’s work in and out of the classroom successfully ties together so many aspects of what ‘best practice’ looks like when it comes to serving students,” said Critchfield. “Standing out in a field of so many incredible and deserving applicants is no small feat, but Heidi immediately caught our eye as a candidate with the skill and dedication needed to support her students, colleagues and community. She’s truly an asset, and I’m grateful for her devoted service to her community.”

Cornell started her teaching career as a first grade teacher for the Lewiston Independent School District in 2009 before moving to second and finally third grade at the same district. She also serves as the school’s Professional Learning Community lead, PBIS Tier 1 facilitator and head teacher, and serves on the Guiding Coalition team and on the Crisis Assistance Support Team. She was also honored as the Martha Baskin Outstanding Elementary Teacher of the Year in 2020 and the Best of Inland Northwest Elementary Teacher finalist in 2024.

Cornell is a graduate of Nyack College in Nyack, NY where she received a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education. She also holds a master’s degree in Curriculum, Instruction and Innovation from Northwest Nazarene University.

In her time with the Lewiston School District, Cornell has created a learning environment that allows students with a variety of needs and learning styles to excel. Her focus on student-centered education gives learners the space they need to thrive and grow in their own unique ways. Through collaboration and networking, she has increased student opportunities and learning, bringing hands-on, authentic experiences directly to students.

“Whether she is collaborating with members of the local Nez Perce Tribe to offer students a unique cultural learning experience or is working with Lewis-Clark State College to bring teaching interns into the classroom, learning happens in immersive and effective ways in Heidi’s classroom,” said Critchfield.

Orchards Elementary School Principal Jennifer Gomez praises Cornell’s ability to individualize opportunities and learning for her students, building their confidence in learning and encouraging them to explore further.

“She tailors lessons to meet the diverse needs of her students, incorporating various learning styles, abilities and interests into her teaching strategies,” said Gomez. “Her commitment to personalized learning, engagement and fostering a positive learning environment has empowered students to thrive academically and personally.”

Cornell has also taken a leadership role in cutting-edge professional development as part of Orchards Elementary’s Professional Learning Community. As PLC lead at the first model PLC school in Idaho, she meets with each of her school’s grade level teams to guide collaboration and ongoing learning.

“Heidi is an incredible mentor, and teachers often reach out to her for guidance on how to best reach students, teach new concepts, intervene when students aren’t understanding, analyze data or engage students,” fellow educator and former colleague Rita Roth said in her letter of recommendation. “Heidi doesn’t just impact her students’ lives, she impacts the culture of the entire school.”

Cornell is the second recipient of the Idaho Teacher of the Year award since Critchfield overhauled the program in 2023 with support from CapEd Credit Union. Mackay educator Trent Van Leuven was selected in October 2023 and will serve as Idaho Teacher of the Year through the end of the year.

“Idaho is putting its best foot forward on the national stage with Heidi’s selection,” said Critchfield. “It’s an honor to be part of this process, and I’m so happy to have been able to be a part of the decision to extend this award to such a dedicated, deserving educator.”

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Attached: Headshot of the 2025 Idaho Teacher of the Year Heidi Cornell