

### ***Elkin Middle School Teacher of the Year:***

Mrs. Tonya Smith, Director of Band and Choral (Grades 7-12), as been selected by her peers as Elkin Middle School's Teacher of the Year for 2011-2012.

Mrs. Smith is an excellent example of what it means to be a professional music educator. Besides being a gifted musician, she has a heart for teaching music to students. She is never happy with 'status quo' and looks above and beyond her job requirements to encourage students to participate in extracurricular music opportunities, whether that is at the district, regional or state level. Ensuring student success in events such as the Surry Honors Chorus; the All-County and All-District Band; the Mars Hill Choral Clinic, and the North Carolina Honors Chorus. Her dedication to the profession and the student learning environment ensures that students are always at the center of education. Mrs. Smith began her education by earning her degree in Music Education from Catawba College in 1989. Prior to that time, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Piano Performance from Elon College and also attended Appalachian State University studying general curriculum. She is a member of the North Carolina Association of Educators; North Carolina Music Educators Association, and the North Carolina Bandmasters Association. She also serves on the Middle School PTA and is the EHS Staff Representative for PTA and American Choral Directors Association. Mrs. Smith's love for music began at a very early age when she sat sharing and listening to her mother sing. She also sat in the church choir section and had a bird's eye view of all the happenings behind the piano and listening to the choir sing. By age five, she was more notably intrigued by music when she began playing the piano. Her love for music continued to grow and pretty soon she was playing other instruments as well. She continued her passion of learning music by earning her degree in music and performing at various events at churches and universities. She was given an opportunity to work with the Burlington Boys' Choir and found her real passion which was teaching. She says that she learned as much from those students as they learned from her. Mrs. Smith took those learnings and went back to school yet again. This time she officially became a teacher! Her professional teaching career includes teaching music in Wilkes County Schools in the early 1990's; teaching music and chorus with Elkin City Schools for 10 years from 1991 – 2001; becoming the Director of Music Ministries for Elkin Presbyterian Church from 2001 – 2006; returning to Elkin City Schools in 2007 as the Chorus Teacher then moving to a Chorus and Band teaching position in 2009, and finally to her current role as the Director of Band and Choral, Grades 7 – 12. Her beliefs are that the school and community must work together to better serve the lives of our students. She also believes that all her life experiences have helped mold her into the great educator that she is today whether that is serving in the church, the school, the community or anywhere she is called to serve. Mrs. Smith's community involvement includes attending evening or weekend events such as PTA, talent shows, concerts and other events that include students. She also involves herself with the senior class play which is performed on the weekend for the entire community. In doing so, she promotes students into learning environments so that they can grow beyond the classroom environment. She reflects back on when students initially came into her classroom. Some did not feel that they are capable of performing in the arts for whatever the reason. To her, this became an opportunity to nurture and develop that student into something they never thought would be possible--to build character, to discover hidden talents, to find that hidden star in each student! Her philosophy is simple. She believes that we must believe that students can learn and grow from their experiences. They must be empowered to be creative and independent thinkers, doers and good citizens. All the while, raising the bar on expected outcomes which help mold students into something better for their own futures. Mrs. Smith lives by the thoughts that education is an ever-evolving profession with challenges and changes that come every day. She believes educators must work together to continue to find solutions and give every child the best possible education.