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For Immediate Release:

Aberdeen Public Schools Foundation Presents Golden Apple Awards

The Aberdeen Public Schools Foundation announced the sixth annual Golden Apple Awards, recognizing individuals that are dedicated, inspiring, and making a difference in the Aberdeen School District. This year's honorees are Brandi Hirsch, Peggy Heermann and Jackie Bindenagel. Each received \$500 and an engraved golden apple.

Brandi Hirsch, Aberdeen School District Special Education Coordinator has held several different positions within the Aberdeen School District but has always demonstrated outstanding performance, positivity, and perseverance. As a classroom teacher Hirsch would take extra time to learn and study interventions and then implement them with fidelity. She was always eager to try whatever she could to help her students. Those students were hers. Her dedication to the Aberdeen School District, educational staff, and students is unprecedented by spending countless hours outside of her typical contract hours to ensure that students are provided the best educational outcomes.

Hirsch currently wears many hats and goes above and beyond to make sure educational staff and students have what they need to be successful. She is a true advocate for students and will

question policies and procedures if they are not benefiting students. It was noted that one of her best attributes is her empathy for others. She locates resources within the school or community to assist families in need. One nominator states, "She is the type of person that makes others want to be a better person. She gives so much to her position and to others that it makes you want to do the same." She frequently serves as a mentor to early career teachers. Her willingness to be there for them and help in any way allows newer teachers more time to devote to their students while also supporting them in being successful educators.

Hirsch states, "I just want to do my part to make our District the best that it can be. After all, we are all in this together and are stronger as a team." Her supporters believe she is a passionate educator and a tireless champion for student success, and they cannot think of anyone more deserving of the Golden Apple Award.

Peggy Heermann, Central High School Special Education teacher has spent her entire career dedicated to students with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. While this work is not easy, her efforts have been noted and appreciated by parents and their children. One parent shared the following successful experience, "Our first experience with this teacher started before we even met her. She provided ideas and guidance to help our child succeed in his mainstream classroom even though he wasn't her student. Her efforts made a noticeable difference and we ultimately decided he would benefit more from being in her classroom. She saw all the good things in him despite the difficult stuff on the surface. She built on his strengths and supported him whenever he fell back a few steps. She was positive every single day even if it wasn't a great day. She was supportive of us and kept us informed so that we could combine our efforts and be consistent between school and home. We developed new skills in the process, and she gave us greater insight into who he is and how he learns.

When everyone had to transition to distance learning, Mrs. Heermann was in touch immediately and must have worked day and night to get everything ready so that her students could pick up where they had left off. She made herself available outside traditional hours

which was helpful as we continued to work outside the home. Between her work in the classroom and as the head coach of our Special Olympics team, this teacher has changed the lives of so many students and their families.”

In addition to her classroom duties, Heermann served as the Head Bocce Coach at the Special Olympics USA Games and was selected as the 2020 South Dakota Special Olympics Coach of the Year. The Aberdeen School District and the Aberdeen community are lucky to have her.

Jackie Bindenagel, CC Lee Elementary grade 4 teacher. Did you know that the best teachers teach from the heart and not from the book? According to one of her nominators, that is exactly what Bindenagel does. It was noted that she was always jolly and lighthearted all year round. Additionally, she was very helpful to students that did or did not need help. Students never had to ask her for help because she just had a teacher instinct. One student remarked, “I guess nobody wants to be in the same grade twice, but if I had to do this grade again, I would want it to be with Mrs. Bindenagel.”

Bindenagel’s students identify her as always very playful. She would come down to gym class and play capture the flag. She would also go outside and play football with the boys and do awesome activities. She was identified as a loving teacher who loved her students as one of her own. Bindenagel spent a lot of her money on snacks, class projects, and rewarding students for being good in class. Another student stated, “She hasn’t only changed my life; she has changed all of her students too. Something I’ve learned is that a truly great teacher is hard to find, difficult to part with, and impossible to forget.”

Bindenagel stated, “Inside the classroom I take great pride in creating a memorable and productive learning environment for my students. I do my best to stay current with technology and all things changing in our world to provide them with the best possible learning experience. The bottom line is that I will do whatever I can to help my students, athletes, and

coworkers in the Aberdeen School District and I want my actions to reflect favorably on a District I love.”

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Attached photo – Brandi Hirsch, Peggy Heermann, and Jackie Bindenagel