**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Mayra Pelayo Awarded as a 2021 Oregon Teacher of the Year Runner-up**

The Oregon Department of Education, in partnership with the Oregon Lottery, is pleased to celebrate Aiken Elementary Kindergarten teacher Mayra Pelayo as a 2021 Teacher of the Year Runner-up, and award both Mayra and her school with a $2,000 cash prize!

“She is a firecracker,” said Tobey Huddleston, principal of Aiken Elementary. “That’s one thing I appreciate about Mayra - her passion for kids. She believes in all of them. It’s not if they’ll do it, but when they’ll do it … She’s determined.”

Pelayo has been teaching at Aiken Elementary for 17 years and also received the Ontario School District Teacher of the Year Award in 2018. In May, Pelayo received recognition as Malheur’s 2021 Regional Teacher of the Year, taking home a $500 cash prize.

The committee who selects Oregon Teacher of the Year recipients said it is Pelayo’s passion and dedication that makes her an excellent connector with her students and sets her apart.

In her application, Pelayo said that making sure students feel important and have the support of adults is key for any successful teacher.

“We need to start every day by letting them know how important they are to us adults, and that we are with them at all times, supporting them not only academically, but in everything they need,” Pelayo wrote. “It is important for us to be more intentional with our teaching and start teaching more emotional-social learning with cultural acceptance and respect for different ethnic and language backgrounds.”

The pivotal role of teachers – and Pelayo’s approach -- has become especially evident in these last several months as schools have transitioned to distance learning in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers have stepped up in countless, innovative ways to ensure students are safe, healthy and engaged to reach their full potential, making this a fitting opportunity to recognize the excellence of teachers throughout the state.

Anyone can nominate a teacher! If you know an outstanding educator nominate them today at [OregonTeacheroftheYear.org](https://oregonteacheroftheyear.org/).