Teachers from Connecticut, Maryland, and Virginia

Receive American Civic Education Teacher Awards

LOS ANGELES — Teachers from Connecticut, Maryland and Virginia are recipients of the 2020 American Civic Education Teacher Awards, recognizing their exemplary work preparing young people to become informed and engaged citizens. The ACETA winners are Aaron Hull of Greenwich High School (Conn.), Ashley Vascik of Boonsboro High School (Md.) and Erin Merrill of Pennington Traditional School (Va.).

The awards are given to teachers of civics, government and related subjects who have demonstrated exceptional expertise, dynamism and creativity in motivating students to learn about the Constitution, U.S. government at the federal, state, and local levels, and public policy.

ACETA is sponsored by the Center for Civic Education, the Center on Representative Government, formerly known as the Center on Congress, at Indiana University, and the National Education Association.

Charles N. Quigley, executive director of the Center for Civic Education, praised Hull, Vascik and Merrill for their dedication to helping young people learn the information and skills necessary to participate as effective and responsible citizens. “We are grateful for all these teachers do to ensure that each succeeding generation understands the principles and values of our representative democracy,” Quigley said.

The three awardees share a passion for explaining democracy and citizenship in an engaging way and helping young people see that local, state and federal government is relevant to their lives.

In his self-portrait essay, Aaron Hull wrote, “My goal is to empower civic engagement through experiential learning so that students understand how they can be the change they want to see in the world, regardless of the myriad challenges they may personally have. We’ve adapted to many student challenges, including autism, hearing impairment, and significant speech challenges.” He added that 10.8% of Greenwich students have disabilities. “I like to think that the civic engagement opportunities I provide are open to anyone interested. A graduate of Bethel College with a bachelor’s degree in history, Hull later earned a master’s degree in political science from the University of Kansas. Hull has been teaching for 22 years.

In her self-portrait, Ashley Vascik wrote, “Education should transcend the classroom environment. As teachers, we hope the knowledge that we give to students will encourage them to pursue their passions and goals. In my classroom, one of the easiest ways to connect the classroom to the outside world is through civil discourse of current events and controversial issues. It is my job to teach the structure of government and trace the history of American politics, but it is also my duty to be the teacher and not the preacher when it comes to politics; to present a neutral, devil’s advocate approach to political discussions; and to ensure my students are able to civily debate the issues and share their viewpoints. Through current events and civil debates in the
classroom, we take that knowledge into the world of social media. We live-chat important speeches on Twitter, we write letters to members of Congress seeking educational change, and I host a now annual State of the Union Address Watch Party. My students understand that their voice matters and that they must make their voices heard”.

Vascik earned her bachelor’s degree with a double major and her master’s degree in teaching- secondary social studies from Frostburg State University. She also earned her educational leadership certificate from Hood College. Vascik has been teaching for 11 years.

A middle school teacher, Erin Merrill included the following in her self-portrait, “As a civics teacher, I am preparing the next group of citizens who will not only support our country as adults, but will lead it. To reach this goal, it is important that students learn our history, our Constitution, and the workings of our government. And not just a memorization of facts; students need to understand WHY. … In my classroom, my biggest priority is to go above and beyond the curriculum with as many experiences as possible.” A colleague wrote of Merrill, “Watching students wrestle with traditional voting, caucus-style voting, and ranked choice is a sight to behold. Seeing them participate in the various styles of democracy shows me that Erin is preparing them to be active participants in American politics. Teaching them civics is one thing, but preparing them to be active, civically minded citizens is a rare thing that I am lucky to have a small part in helping.” A graduate of the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia, she earned a degree in American studies with concentrations in history and education. Merrill has been teaching for 15 years.

The ACETA program selects and showcases three teachers whose students represent the diversity of the American public- and private-school systems. Applicants must be full-time classroom teachers of grades K–12. There is no fee to apply. Applicants must submit a two-page self-portrait essay, their resume, and two letters of recommendation—one from a teaching peer and one from their school principal.

**About the Sponsoring Organizations**

The Center for Civic Education ([www.civiced.org](http://www.civiced.org)) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization dedicated to fostering the development of informed, responsible participation in civic life by citizens committed to values and principles fundamental to American constitutional democracy.

The Center on Representative Government ([corg.iu.edu](http://corg.iu.edu)) is a nonpartisan educational institution that believes our nation’s great experiment of representative democracy has served us well for more than 200 years, but it fundamentally rests on an informed electorate that understands our system of government and participates in our civic life.

The National Education Association ([www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)) is the nation’s largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.