



MEDIA RELEASE
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919 N Broad Street • Brooksville, FL 34601

School District Announces 2023 Teacher of the Year

Brooksville - School administrators, district leaders, elected officials and educators throughout the Hernando County School District gathered together on Jan. 21 for the Teacher of the Year ceremony, which celebrates teachers who have been nominated as outstanding professionals by their colleagues and peers. To the shouts and delight of Central High School's NJROTC students, who had been invited to participate in this year's event, it was Commander Christian Cruz from Central who was announced as the 2023 Teacher of the Year for the school district.

"I am a product of the JROTC Program. From kindergarten through my senior year, I attended the American Military Academy in Puerto Rico," Commander Cruz said. "After graduation, I joined the U.S. Navy. The JROTC Program provided me with all the tools and resources to be successful in life. I could not think of a better way to pay back the efforts of every instructor who taught me and helped me along the way than to lead the NJROTC cadets of Central."

Commander Cruz served in the United States Navy for more than 30 years and retired as an officer in 2019. Prior to retiring, a fellow ROTC colleague encouraged him to consider bringing his training and skills to Central's nationally-recognized Naval Junior ROTC Program. "All it took for me to say yes to this opportunity was a walk through the ROTC's hallways. It spoke to me about many years of consistent success," Cruz said.

Central High Principal Kelly Slusser credits Cruz with continuing to reach the highest goals of the program: "Some instructors might be intimidated by taking over a regiment that has earned state and national distinction for many years. But since becoming part of our family in 2019, Commander Cruz has not missed a step." In fact, Central's NJROTC has grown under Cruz and continues to garner awards and respect throughout the state and nation. Commander Cruz also teaches the Embry Riddle Dual Enrollment aerospace courses at CHS. Cadets who have taken his courses have a nearly perfect pass rate on the FAA licensing exam. "All of Bear Country is so proud and excited for him. Commander Cruz is an outstanding and incredibly caring educator," Slusser said.

Superintendent John Stratton said, "On behalf of the school board and every member of our school district, we congratulate Commander Cruz. We are grateful for his military service and we are honored to have him continue to serve the students of Central. He is a model of integrity and an exemplary educator who teaches students to learn and lead with confidence and pride."

"I hope our cadets see that they too can be successful in life if they work hard and put their best effort forward in everything they do," Commander Cruz said. "We want them to use the leadership, citizenship, and life skills we promote in our NJROTC program and put them to good use in their own lives, with their families and jobs, and their own communities."