

Laura Ritenour ***Teacher of the Year***

Laura Ritenour began her teaching career in 1993, and first taught in Highlands County in 1994, at Lake Placid Middle School. Even when taking some time to stay home with her four children, Ms. Ritenour volunteered in the school system

as accompanist to various choirs and as classroom volunteer for many teachers. She has taught in both elementary and middle schools teaching music, mathematics, and drop-out prevention. Ms. Ritenour holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Education and Mathematics from Samford University.



*Jennifer Rhymes, Mid-Florida Credit Union;
Laura Ritenour, Highlands County School
Teacher of the Year; Wally Cox,
Superintendent of Schools*

In her current position, Ms. Ritenour is on the Curriculum Leader Team, the Lighthouse Team, and is chair of the Parent Involvement Committee. In addition to these responsibilities outside the classroom, Ms. Ritenour creates, directs, and presents many musical performances each year. She has written song lyrics and programs for the *Leader in Me* school presentations as well as for individual grade levels. After school show choir and tone chime groups are among her performing groups. She is the secretary of the Highlands County Music Educators Association, and assists with the preparations for the Highlands County Choral Festival. Ms. Ritenour believes it is important to incorporate reading and social studies to support the classroom teachers, because learning is best with connections. Highly engaging activities are her goal when planning lessons using centers and technology when possible.

Ms. Ritenour is certified in Music K-12, Middle Grades Math 5-9, and Math 6-12. She has received the volunteer of the year award twice at Cracker Trail Elementary. Also as a volunteer, she is director of the children's department at Southside Baptist church and leads the following programs: Truth & Training/AWANA, Sunday School, Children's Church, and Children's Choir, directing multiple performances yearly. Additionally, she has directed seven years of Vacation Bible School. Ms. Ritenour is currently a keyboardist with the morning praise team.

Her principal, Melissa Blackman stated, "Not only is she a talented musician, Ms. Ritenour has a natural gift of encouraging others to see the best in themselves and others. Her leadership skills, content expertise, love for students, and her ability to build relationships with colleagues and family make her an invaluable member of our school and district." Ms. Ritenour believes that every child needs to feel successful, and that every child has talent. A previous student, at the end of her senior year, wrote to thank Ms. Ritenour for having "gone out of your way to make it easier for others while making it harder on yourself." Her goal is that each child will be exposed to and learn to appreciate many styles of music, learn to use it responsibly, and have the knowledge to participate in it for life. Children need to find the special area in which they excel. Music is often that area for students who struggle in more traditionally academic areas.