



## Bergen County Music Teacher Named New Jersey's Teacher of the Year for 2016-17

**For Immediate Release**

**Contact:** Michael Yaple  
David Saenz

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609-292-1126

**Trenton, NJ** - The Christie Administration today announced that Argine Safari, a music teacher at Pascack Valley High School, is New Jersey's 2016-17 State Teacher of the Year.

"Argine's talent and dedication to her students are well known in her home district, and now the story of her love of teaching will be shared throughout the state," said Acting Commissioner Kimberley Harrington who introduced Argine at today's meeting of the State Board of Education.

Argine has been an educator for 20 years, and has taught music to high school students at Pascack Valley High School since 2005. But her story really began long before that, over 5,000 miles away, in Yerevan, Armenia. The daughter of physicists, Argine says she never thought she would become a teacher. However, her parents instilled in her and her twin sister a love of music, and with further encouragement from a teacher, she applied for and was accepted to Moscow P.I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory, the top music school in the country. She excelled there, and in the first year of her doctorate program, she made the decision to emigrate to the United States with her husband and baby.

At first, she worked in jobs as a translator, insurance agent and financial advisor, and found performances involving music on evenings and weekends. Her favorite was with the then-newly formed Brooklyn Youth Chorus. She was active with the chorus at the time of the 9/11 attacks, and was touched by the circumstances of one student who had lost her father in the attack and wanted to attend LaGuardia High School of Music & Performing Arts. Argine volunteered her time to help the student, who was ultimately accepted to the school of her dreams. That turned out to be the pivotal moment in Argine's professional life.

"None of my performing experiences compared to the feeling I had when I learned about her success," said Argine. "I knew I had to turn my passion for music into a career of teaching."

She earned her teaching certificate in 2005, and shortly thereafter joined the staff of Pascack Valley High School. She has distinguished herself by providing performing opportunities for her students with groups such as The Vienna Boys Choir, Robert Kapilow, and The American Boychoir. Her students have won many awards over the years, and many of her former students are currently music majors in college.

"I believe my strongest and most important contribution in education is nurturing and developing true leaders of the future," Argine said. "I teach my students that true leaders *inspire*, and thus, help others by boosting their self-esteem."

Argine is fluent in Armenian and Russian, and her music repertoire that she selects in her classroom includes songs in more than 20 languages.

"Argine truly connects the study of music to exploring cultures, languages and emotions," said Thomas DeMaio, Argine's principal at Pascack Valley High School. "Her enthusiasm, professionalism, and commitment to her students have had an everlasting effect on the students and families with whom she has so diligently worked."

Argine holds an associate degree in music education from Yerevan R. Melikian College of Music in Armenia; a bachelor's degree in piano performance and theory and a master's degree in musicology and composition, both from the Moscow P.I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Moscow; and a bachelor's degree in business management and finance from Brooklyn College. She earned her teaching certificate through the alternate route teacher-preparation program at New Jersey City University; and a supervisor certificate from Rutgers University. She has also taken graduate courses at the Westminster Choir College of Rider University.

Argine, a Fort Lee resident, is a member of 15 professional associations, has received numerous special awards and recognitions over the years, and has presented in a variety of locations such as the Moscow Conservatory, the Juilliard School of Music, and The Carnegie Hall Choral Workshops.

The finalists for the State Teacher of the Year achieved the highest scores on their written applications and videos, and then reported for an interview that consisted of a performance assessment and a question-and-answer session. The other finalists who were also recognized at today's ceremony include Monica Goncalves, a

social studies teacher at Linden High School, Linden; Jennifer Schoepflin, a fifth grade elementary school teacher at Simmons Elementary School, Clayton; and Jeanette Wehner, a fifth grade special education teacher at the Emma Havens Young Elementary School, Brick Township.

In 2014, the New Jersey Department of Education integrated the Teacher of the Year Program with the Governor's Teacher Recognition Program to form the Governor's Educator of the Year Program. In her role as State Teacher of the Year, Argine will work closely with the Department of Education and give presentations around the state and participate in national activities, including meeting the President of the United States.

Additional information can be found on the [Governor's Educator of the Year webpage](#).