

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



NEWS RELEASE

Minnesota Student and Former Teacher Selected as Section 5 Recipients of NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 9, 2016) — **Ethan Och**, a student at Swanville (Minnesota) High School, and **Gina Christopherson**, a former teacher at Swanville (Minnesota) High School, have been selected the 2016 Section 5 recipients of the “National High School Heart of the Arts Award” by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The National High School Heart of the Arts Award was created by the NFHS to recognize those individuals who exemplify the ideals of the positive heart of the arts that represent the core mission of education-based activities. This is the third year that the National High School Heart of the Arts Award has been offered.

For 15 years, Christopherson was a music teacher, and band/choir conductor at Swanville High School. Among her longtime students was Ethan Och, an outstanding student with a 4.0667 grade-point average and a 35 composite ACT score. When Och determined that his advancing muscular atrophy would cause him to quit his longtime participation in the school band, pep band and marching band, Christopherson determined otherwise.

Christopherson was aware of some music apps, but began researching others. With much experimentation and an amplifier hooked up to an iPad, Och has been able to continue his participation in percussion.

Their story was picked up by the NFHS’ “High School Today,” USA Today and other national media outlets. In the process, they began inspiring other music directors, parents, young musicians and students – both with and without disabilities – throughout the country. The school has received

feedback that individuals in similar situations realized that technology might be able to help their participation in the world of music as well. A new amplifier was donated to the Swanville High School music program from more than a thousand miles away, and offers of iPads that Och declined were passed along to others. Christopherson volunteered to help other teachers brainstorm ways to help their students be involved in music programs. She strongly believes that the arts should be a place of full inclusion.

Och has a bright future in front of him, as he is planning on going to the University of Minnesota to study computer science or engineering, and already has hopes of pursuing post-graduate work.

About the Award

The NFHS divides the nation into eight geographical sections. The states in Section 5 are Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri.

Nominations for this award were generated through NFHS member state associations and reviewed by the NFHS Heart of the Arts Award Selection Committee composed of state association staff members.

While the national winner will be recognized June 29 at the NFHS Summer Meeting in Reno, Nevada, the section winners will be recognized within their respective states and will receive awards before the end of the current school year.

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and fine arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and fine arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 16 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.8 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; produces publications for high school coaches, officials and athletic directors; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, spirit coaches, speech and debate coaches and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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