



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI-NR 2019-54

Tuesday, August 20, 2019

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Wisconsin's National Teacher of the Year nominee is named

Herb Kohl Educational Foundation gives \$6,000 award

MADISON – The Department of Public Instruction announced Wisconsin's representative to the National Teacher of the Year program will be **Erin McCarthy** of Milwaukee. McCarthy is an eighth-grade social studies teacher at Greendale Middle School and the 2020 Wisconsin Middle School Teacher of the Year. A committee comprised of educators, partner organization representatives, and students made the selection.

"Erin is highly motivated in serving our next generation. I'm happy she will be representing Wisconsin on the national stage," State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor said. "Erin encourages all of her students to be personally engaged in social studies and works to make sure all students are included in the inquiry process."

"Teachers play such an important role in children's lives," said Herb Kohl, philanthropist and businessman, who co-sponsors the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program through his educational foundation. "I am pleased to support our teachers in their efforts to help every child achieve."

As Wisconsin's National Teacher of the Year representative, McCarthy will receive \$6,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation. She was one of four educators named to the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program in the spring to represent the 2019-20 teaching corps. The others are Chelsea Miller of Jefferson, an art teacher at Sullivan and West elementary schools in the Jefferson School District, Elementary School Teacher of the Year; Chad Sperzel-Wuchterl of Milwaukee, an art teacher at Reagan High School in Milwaukee Public Schools, the High School Teacher of the Year; and Bawaajigekwe Andrea DeBungie of Washburn, a special education teacher at Ashland Middle and Lake Superior Elementary schools in the Ashland School District, Special Services Teacher of the Year.

The National Teacher of the Year Program began in 1952 and is the oldest national honors program that focuses public attention on excellence in teaching. The National Teacher of the Year will be chosen by a selection committee in spring 2020. More about McCarthy is below. Video footage of McCarthy is available on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's YouTube channel, at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38oEC3FJFI8>.

(more)

About Wisconsin's 2020 National Teacher of the Year representative

Erin McCarthy strives to spark every child's curiosity about history, along with their sense of agency in the present, so that they leave her class enthusiastic not only to explore the world, but to improve it.

McCarthy sparks curiosity and motivates reluctant learners by connecting them to diverse figures, especially those whose voices have been left out of history. McCarthy has developed a curriculum for writing these voices back into the narrative. At the end of the year, students perform an exercise of rewriting a chapter from their own textbook with a goal of making the story more complete. This project has successfully engaged students who were otherwise reluctant to learn.

McCarthy labors to truly include every student in her classroom's community. "I've shifted the focus in my classroom to valuing the experience of each student and not teaching to the 'average,'" she explained. "The work is exhausting but yields the greatest rewards." She will, for example, take extra time to find the right story from history to engage a struggling reader. She includes visual, musical, and tactile experiences in her classroom so a diverse range of students can learn effectively. In addition, McCarthy embarked on a multi-year project to ensure students in special education can fully participate in her class's National History Day project.

It was McCarthy who originally brought National History Day to the school. Students pick a historical topic of choice and learn to manage complex a project comprising research, collaboration, developing an argument, and sharing outside the classroom. Over four years of collaboration between McCarthy and special educators, Greendale's National History Day project has gradually become truly inclusive of students with disabilities.

McCarthy is a leader in engaging students in self-directed research, known as "inquiry-based learning." Educators nationwide asked to learn about her "Four I's of Inquiry" model for fueling students' curiosity. The approach shows versatility; her class even used it to respond to a "crisis of unkindness" at school. Inspired by historical examples yet working with current data, students developed plans for improving their school culture, presented them to administration, and formed a "Fix It to Fight It Club."

Another way McCarthy connects students to history – inviting family histories into the curriculum – also helps families connect to the school. One mother thanked McCarthy after students interviewed family members about the 2001 terrorist attacks. "Being from a military family, September 11 was a life changing day for us ... Thank you for providing this teachable and talkable moment."

Musing on the world of education, McCarthy would like to see more focus on making the community an extension of the classroom, for career development and civic participation. She's excited about the "whole child" movement, which emphasizes education for social, emotional, and other goals, in addition to academic assessment scores. In McCarthy's classroom, skills like working hard and pushing one's self get equal weight as growth in one's knowledge and academic abilities.

In addition to classroom responsibilities, McCarthy serves on teams for diversity and equity in her school district; she has helped trained teachers to provide students with disabilities with opportunities to grow and succeed. McCarthy is a member of the board of directors of the League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County, and has participated in numerous professional development opportunities in her field throughout the country. She holds a bachelor's degree in history from Roosevelt University, Chicago, and a master's in public history from Loyola University, Chicago.

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NOTE: Video of Erin McCarthy, Wisconsin's representative to the National Teacher of the Year program, is available on the Department of Public Instruction YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38oEC3FJF18>.

This news release is available electronically at <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2019/wisconsins-national-teacher-year-nominee-named>.