East Troy educator named Wisconsin High School Teacher of the Year

Claudia Felske to receive $3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers named Claudia Felske, an English teacher at East Troy High School, Wisconsin’s High School Teacher of the Year for the 2010-11 school year during a surprise ceremony at the school today.

Evers noted that, as part of the Teacher of the Year honor, Felske will receive a $3,000 award from U.S. Senator Herb Kohl, through his educational foundation.

“Recognizing Felske in a substantial way not only rewards someone who has devoted her life to teaching children, it also focuses attention on the importance of having caring, committed adults in our classrooms,” Evers said. “We need quality educators to ensure that every student graduates ready for the workforce or further education.”

The Herb Kohl Educational Foundation has awarded millions of dollars to Wisconsin educators, students, and schools over the years. The foundation’s teacher recognition program rewards those who demonstrate the ability to inspire students’ love of learning, create innovative projects or programs, and show a commitment to community.

“My support of the Teacher of the Year program recognizes that quality teaching has a significant impact on student learning,” Kohl said. “Felske is devoted to teaching and becoming a better teacher. She not only works in her classroom and school, but extends her efforts to shape education in her district and beyond. But, she is not just an educator; Felske also makes significant contributions to her local community.”

Using music as a bridge to poetry, Felske has her students analyze popular songs to tease out layers of meaning in the lyrics with the goal moving even reluctant learners to use interpretive skills independently. She revamped the entire sophomore English term paper unit to make it more meaningful to students and correct historic learning and performance problems. The “I-Search” paper has students seek to answer a personally meaningful question. It has yielded zero failures and one plagiarism case that was resolved in the revision process in the first year. Felske instituted an intergenerational book club so students can see their parents model life-long learning; brought in outside artists, actors, and authors to enhance the educational experience; and had students try Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein in the courtroom to maximize engagement.

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“After collaborating several times with the choir director at school, teaching choir students how to decipher the poetry in the lyrics they were singing, I transferred my role to a student who was in my English class and in choir,” she wrote. After the student co-taught a poem, the student engaged her peers in interpreting lyrics. “We concluded after their concert, that we could now ‘hear their understanding.’ This experience reminded me of the value of teaching students to teach, allowing them to model active learning while deepening their own understanding of the material, their peers, and the learning process itself,” Felske said.

Felske achieved National Board Certification in 2004 and is English department chair, a certified Smart Board Trainer, and faculty adviser to the school’s first Diversity Club. She also serves on the East Troy Community Library Board, volunteers for East Troy Education Foundation events, and is a reader for Advanced Placement English exams.

Felske is a graduate of Marquette University in Milwaukee with a bachelor of arts degree in Writing Intensive English. She earned her teaching certificate and a master’s degree in creative writing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Evers will recognize Felske as the Wisconsin High School Teacher of the Year during his State of Education address Sept. 16 in Madison.

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NOTES: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2010_111c.pdf.