Waukesha educator named Wisconsin Middle School Teacher of the Year

Maureen Look-Ainsworth to receive $3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers named Maureen Look-Ainsworth of Richfield, a seventh- and eighth-grade science teacher at Horning Middle School in Waukesha, Wisconsin’s Middle 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, Look-Ainsworth will receive a $3,000 award from U.S. Senator Herb Kohl, through his educational foundation.

“Recognizing Look-Ainsworth 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. “Look-Ainsworth 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; Look-Ainsworth also makes significant contributions to her local community.”

“As long as I have known her, Maureen has always emphasized the need for students to do hands-on, project- and problem-based approaches to science instruction,” wrote a colleague in nomination materials. Look-Ainsworth has earned administrative and community support for teaching critical thinking through science. When, for example, Look-Ainsworth is setting up a crime scene, drawing a heart on the floor with duct tape, or dissecting deer hearts, “they completely support and trust my judgment. They enjoy seeing how interested the kids are in science, how invested they are in their own education, and how their behavior often changes from unruly to cooperative because the content and delivery are so captivating.”

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Look-Ainsworth has developed innovative science units such as “Crime Scene Investigation” and “Forensics” to enrich and deepen students’ understanding of science as it’s applied in the “real world.” She reaches out to “struggling” and “grey-area” students, using brain research methods to improve their study habits. She strives for inclusiveness by coaching eighth-grade Science Clubs that include students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students, providing partial or full scholarships for field trips to various science venues.

As coach for the high school Science Olympiad Team at West Allis / West Milwaukee, Look-Ainsworth reaches beyond her school into the community. She has worked with the Sally Ride Academy, staff development workshop, and directs the Waukesha Camp Invention. She is on the worship team at her church; taught biblical studies classes for three years; and coordinates the “Boxes of Love” Thanksgiving food boxes for the economically disadvantaged, a partnership between the church and school.

Before taking her position at Horning Middle School, Look-Ainsworth taught at Fairview Elementary and the former Walker Middle School, both in Milwaukee, and at Hadfield Elementary School in Waukesha. Look-Ainsworth holds a bachelor’s degree in human development from Marquette University in Milwaukee. She earned master’s degrees in inquiry and brain research from Carroll University in Waukesha and biblical studies from Midwest Bible College in Milwaukee. She also has earned master’s credits from Marian University in Fond du Lac and Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee. Evers will recognize Look-Ainsworth as the Wisconsin Middle School Teacher of the Year during his State of Education address Sept. 16 in Madison.

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