Whitewater educator named Wisconsin Special Services Teacher of the Year

Peggy Wuenstel to receive $3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers named Peggy Wuenstel, a speech and language pathologist at Washington Elementary School in Whitewater, Wisconsin’s Special Services 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, Wuenstel will receive a $3,000 award from U.S. Senator Herb Kohl, through his educational foundation.

“Recognizing Wuenstel 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. “Wuenstel 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; Wuenstel also makes significant contributions to her local community.”

“I believe that you can only work to become a better teacher if you are also working to become a better person,” Wuenstel wrote in her application materials. Her colleagues describe her as someone who embraces this belief. She is continually striving to improve school life for her students and colleagues, educational life for aspiring teachers, and the quality of life in her community.

Wuenstel brought full inclusion for speech and language students to Washington Elementary, a change one colleague calls welcome. “I’m always excited when Mrs. Wuenstel’s students are in my classroom because we all reap the benefits of everything she does.” A parent remarked on how Wuenstel championed the desire to have her son with an autism spectrum disorder taught in the regular classroom. She worked on educating herself and her son’s teachers to help meet the now “A” student’s needs, the parent wrote.
Because Wuenstel believes early reading skills are key to future academic success, she developed a “Feeling My Letters” program to supplement kindergarten classroom instruction. She developed a family math night called “Math Matters,” and co-chaired the school’s “Science Circus,” a three-ring science fair in a family friendly setting. She also coordinates a yearly “Penny Drop” campaign to help students fundraise for various charities.

She has served on district committees, including the Leadership Team, Curriculum Council, Parents and Teacher Together, and the building Resource Team. She has been active in the Early Childhood Coordinating Council and United Migrant Opportunity Services. She has mentored more than 25 students in field study and student teaching placements.

In addition to her work at Washington Elementary, Wuenstel teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. “My college students keep me honest about my understanding of the legislation, administration, content, and design of school-based services. They require me to be able to delineate why I make therapy choices that I make in serving students and supporting regular education classrooms. My ‘real world’ job gives me credibility in the college classroom and a wealth of current experiences and illustrations of topics that might otherwise be abstract,” she wrote of the dual jobs.

Wuenstel is a graduate of Marquette University in Milwaukee with a bachelor of arts degree in communicative disorders and a master’s degree in speech pathology. Prior to working at Washington Elementary, Wuenstel was at Lakeview Elementary and Whitewater Middle schools in Whitewater. She also worked in the Palmyra-Eagle School District, the Walworth County Birth to Three Program, the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Trevor and Wilmot elementary schools. Evers will recognize Wuenstel as the Wisconsin Special Services 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_111d.pdf.