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Milwaukee educator named Wisconsin Elementary School Teacher of the Year

Mai Shoua Xiong to receive \$3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON — In a surprise ceremony at her school, Mai Shoua Xiong, a first-grade teacher at Milwaukee Public Schools' Academy of Accelerated Learning, was named Wisconsin's Elementary School Teacher of the Year for the 2015-16 school year.

State Superintendent Tony Evers made the announcement during an all-school assembly. As part of the Teacher of the Year honor, Xiong will receive \$3,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

"A Teacher of the Year demonstrates an unwavering commitment to students," Evers said. "It's my honor to recognize Mai for the work she does and for being such an exceptional representative of educators in Wisconsin's public schools."

"Highlighting excellent work and leadership in our schools and bringing these individuals forward for recognition reminds educators of the important work they do and the reason they chose this career," said Herb Kohl, philanthropist, businessman, and former U.S. Senator, who co-sponsors the program through his educational foundation. "Educators contribute to our communities in so many ways. Also, we want to encourage talented students to enter the field of education in Wisconsin."

Xiong is described as "empathetic, compassionate, and caring" and as someone who "works tirelessly to provide effective and varied instructional strategies that students with different learning styles and abilities can greatly benefit from." These learning experiences tailored to each child's needs are at the core of Xiong's educational philosophy. "My role is to mentor and develop my students to reach their greatest potential by setting high standards for every student and finding various ways for them to achieve the standards," she said. "Education is a unique and individual experience for each child who enters my classroom."

As someone for whom English was a second language, she is passionate about improving education for children who are English language learners and being a constant learner herself. "I would like to be a more effective educator for my English language learners and further develop my knowledge as an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme educator," she said. Xiong believes the key to improving education for students learning

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English is additional training and education available for teachers with these students in their classroom. “We need workshops to adequately train us to effectively teach children whose first language is not English so they too may be provided a fair chance at receiving a rigorous education,” she said.

Getting parents involved and integrating them as an important part of their child’s education is also something Xiong sees as a key to student success. “I believe a student’s No. 1 teacher is the parent and educational success is most achievable when there is evident teamwork between parents, teachers, and community,” she said. Xiong offers opportunities year-round for parents to be involved, beginning with acquainting families to her classroom before school starts. “I have an open door policy in my classroom where parents are encouraged to volunteer for field trips, read with small groups, and work on small projects,” she said. She instituted other family-oriented events, allowing parents and kids to work together. Pastries for Parents, Muffins with Mom, Donuts with Dad, and a Thanksgiving feast are all events she created that have been noted as favorites among parents with students who have been in Xiong’s classes.

Volunteering to take on additional responsibility within her school as well as involvement with her community are also very important to Xiong. She serves as the webmaster for her school’s website and also volunteered to be the model classroom in the “Teacher Effectiveness for all Learners” project to help other teachers improve literacy instruction by observing her methods and practices. She also serves as an adviser at the Hmong American Peace Academy on the committee for Hmong as a foreign language.

Xiong holds a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Alverno College, and she earned a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She began her teaching career at Albert Story School in 1998 before starting with Academy of Accelerated Learning in 1999. Evers will recognize Xiong as the Wisconsin Elementary School Teacher of the Year during his State of Education address Sept. 17 in Madison.

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