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Reedsburg educator named Wisconsin High School Teacher of the Year

Sarah Breckley to receive \$3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON — In a surprise ceremony at her school, Sarah Breckley, a high school world languages (Spanish) teacher at Reedsburg Area High School, was named Wisconsin’s High School Teacher of the Year for the 2016-17 school year.

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

“Wisconsin needs talented individuals to teach in our classrooms and inspire our young people to seek out careers that will fulfill their dreams,” Evers said. “A Teacher of the Year recipient demonstrates an unwavering commitment to students, and it is an honor to recognize educators who do so much for Wisconsin’s public schools.”

“The Teacher of the Year program highlights the many contributions educators make to our children, schools, and communities,” said Herb Kohl, philanthropist and businessman, who co-sponsors the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program through his educational foundation. “They are leaders who put forth extraordinary effort to help all children achieve.”

Breckley’s students master Spanish through innovative lessons that incorporate dance, filmmaking, improvisational acting, debate, Skyping with native speakers, and even creating fashion shows. “I must continue to be the ‘craziest teacher’ they have ever had, teaching a class that ‘has a surprise every day’ in a way that all students believe they can ‘learn and feel proud,’” she said. Breckley also leads immersive language trips that feature homestays outside of the United States to give her students authentic opportunities to apply their learning while broadening their perspectives. She says that a student’s time in her class “must give purpose to language learning, value to different cultures, and hope for the future.”

A parent of a former student commended Breckley’s “rare ability to truly engage her students as she makes learning fun while continually challenging them and drawing out the best in them.” The parent’s daughter was so touched by Breckley’s ability to inspire a love of learning that she decided to pursue an education major in college.

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Breckley brings her own experiences as a world traveler into the classroom to open doors for students and to show what is possible in the world. She has planted medicinal gardens in Costa Rica and spent four months in Spain as an English teaching assistant for a local school and a volunteer in a Sevilla soup kitchen.

Breckley knows that a teacher's job doesn't end at the bell or the front door of the school. A frequent community volunteer, she gives of her time as a Discovery Youth Leader, taking on projects like construction for Habitat for Humanity houses and cleaning the grounds of the Reedsburg Safe Harbor Homeless Shelter. She tutors students before and after school and during Reedsburg Area High School's response to intervention hours so she can understand each student's unique educational and personal hurdles. She serves as a document translator and assists communication during parent meetings and conferences.

"Learning shouldn't end when we graduate from college; it should evolve and improve as culture, technology, and pedagogy change," she says about her belief in ongoing professional development for teachers. A fellow educator who attended a technology conference with Breckley noted her enthusiasm at learning as much as possible to take back to her classroom. "As she learned about a new tool for her classroom, she created a lesson to utilize it. Upon returning from the conference, she excitedly shared all she learned with the rest of our teachers at an all-school inservice meeting."

Breckley is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she earned her bachelor's degree in Spanish and the University of Wisconsin-Stout, where she earned her master's degree in education. Evers will recognize Breckley as the Wisconsin High School Teacher of the Year during his State of Education address Sept. 15 in Madison.

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