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Matthew Miller to represent Wisconsin in National Teacher of the Year program

Herb Kohl Educational Foundation gives \$6,000 award

MADISON — Inspired by a grandfather who worked on civil rights and progressive issues, Matthew W. Miller Sr., an English learner teacher at North High School in Sheboygan, pushes himself to make a difference in the lives of his students. Named Wisconsin’s 2018 Special Services Teacher of the Year last spring, he will represent the state in the National Teacher of the Year program.

“Matthew pushes himself to do more, so here he is our state’s representative to the National Teacher of the Year program,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “He focuses on providing students what they need to succeed and is an excellent role model for teachers in his school, the Sheboygan Area School District, and across our state and nation.”

“Teachers make such a difference in the lives of children,” said Herb Kohl, philanthropist and businessman, who co-sponsors the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program through his educational foundation. “I am pleased to support our teachers in their efforts to help all children achieve.”

While living in Harlem in pursuit of his teaching degree, Miller offered tutoring or encouragement for the children of neighbors and workers. Later as a middle school English teacher, he learned that the more he served his students’ families, the more he earned his students’ respect and trust. When he moved to Sheboygan, Miller offered English classes to Spanish-speaking adults, many of them parents of students.

With a passion for leadership and community service, Miller has facilitated hundreds of leadership, service learning, and community-building projects for students in the district. He created the Hmong Leadership Collective, a statewide student-led group and an outgrowth of the district’s Hmong Leadership Council, which provides more



Matthew W. Miller Sr.
English Learners Teacher
North High School, Sheboygan
VIDEO: [Wisconsin’s National Teacher of the Year Nominee.](#)

(more)

than a thousand hours of community service. The collective seeks to strengthen Hmong culture, identity, and communities to positively transform society and build leadership skills. A teacher colleague noted that Miller helps Hmong students learn about and celebrate their own culture, while adapting to life in America.

While some would term his teaching style as “relationship building,” Miller says he is trying to be a “future builder.” He considers every learner a potential leader and tailors instruction to meet students’ individual language, leadership, and life needs. He says he’d like to incorporate leadership development into the high school curricula because leadership training would give youth a “crucial opportunity to discover some of the most significant growth they will ever experience, and our society some of its greatest future leaders.”

A former student wrote that “Mr. Miller not only showed me and many other students what a leader should be like, but also how to become a leader ourselves.” The student praised opportunities to volunteer with the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, attend leadership retreats and conferences, and participate in community arts collaboration as well as cultural and educational presentations. In a letter supporting Miller’s nomination for a Kohl Fellowship, North High School Associate Principal Eric Spielman said that Miller’s “greatest success is the deep, meaningful relationships he establishes with students, staff, families, and the greater Sheboygan community.” He added that Miller’s role with students extends beyond teacher, to mentor, friend, liaison, and advocate.

Miller’s grant writing for a precollege program through the University of Wisconsin-Sheboygan provided a “Language and Leadership” summer program that boosted college readiness and civic engagement among area English learners from lower-income families. A project with Bookworm Gardens, a children’s book-themed community center and park, brought together elders in conversations with teens who then created visual, literary, and musical artifacts based on the elders’ stories. “Matthew inspires his students to do better, and he inspires teachers that way as well,” a colleague wrote. He leaves one “feeling that they can do more, do more for students, more for the school, and more for the community, and that doing more, for the sake of young people, matters.”

Miller began his career as an English teacher in New York City. He also taught at Hunter College in New York and for Northcentral Technical College and Upper Iowa University’s Wausau campus. For four years, he was an English teacher in Mexico City. He currently teaches English learners at North High School in Sheboygan. Miller earned a bachelor’s degree in English from Lawrence University in Appleton and a Master of Arts in Secondary Education-English from City University of New York-Hunter College.

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As Wisconsin's National Teacher of the Year representative, Miller will receive \$6,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation. He was among four educators named to the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program in spring to represent the 2017-18 teaching corps. The others are **Mary Ellen Kanthack**, a fifth-grade teacher in the Genoa City J2 School District, Elementary School Teacher of the Year; **Jill Runde**, a school counselor at Indian Mound Middle School in McFarland, Middle School Teacher of the Year; and **Brent Zinkel**, a history teacher at Wausau East High School, High School Teacher of the Year. All four educators will be honored at a Capitol ceremony during the State of Education address at noon on Sept. 21.

The National Teacher of the Year program began in 1952 and is the oldest national honors program that focuses public attention on excellence in teaching. The National Teacher of the Year will be chosen by a selection committee in spring 2018.

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NOTES: Video footage of Matthew Miller, Wisconsin's representative to the National Teacher of the Year program, is available on the Department of Public Instruction YouTube channel. This news release is available electronically at https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2017_77.pdf.