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Sarahí Monterrey to represent Wisconsin in National Teacher of the Year program

Herb Kohl Educational Foundation gives \$6,000 award

MADISON – Sarahí Monterrey’s approach to teaching embodies a genuine belief that every student has the ability to learn, grow, and overcome obstacles. As an English Learner (EL) teacher at North High School in Waukesha, Monterrey was named one of Wisconsin’s two High School Teachers of the Year in May, and she will represent the state in the National Teacher of the Year program.

“Sarahí really sees the whole person when she looks at her students,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “Her focus on growth – both in her students and in her school’s programs – makes her an excellent representative for Wisconsin in this prestigious program.”

“Teachers play such an important role in children’s lives,” 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 every child achieve.”

Monterrey meets her students where they are and encourages them to reach high. “She got involved in my community and lifted me when I thought I could not possibly get back up,” writes a former student, who recalls Monterrey encouraging her when she felt worthless and anxious after receiving a “D” in a geometry class. “She believed in me when I did not even believe in myself.”

Monterrey’s dedication to growth is captured in a quote that inspires her, penned by Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire: “no one is born fully formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are.” While she emphasizes growth and success in her teaching, she also cares deeply about her students’ backgrounds, understanding that families, cultures, and socioeconomics are all key parts of shaping who kids are when they enter her classroom.

“As a native of El Salvador who immigrated to the United States at the age of 1, I never felt that my culture was valued or represented throughout my education,” said Monterrey. “This is why having a culturally responsive classroom is one of my top priorities.”

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In practice, her commitment to a culturally responsive classroom means viewing differences as an opportunity to learn from and connect with one another. Monterrey redesigned the curriculum of an English class that she co-teaches to include multicultural authors and perspectives and incorporates journaling into the classroom to gain a better understanding of her students' backgrounds. She also uses a "Cognate Word Wall" to help students identify words that sound similar in different languages, and in doing so, honors and represents students' home languages.

Additionally, Monterrey serves on the school's Culturally Responsive Community Team as an advocate for equitable practices. In this role, she designs professional development sessions on both the school and district levels about how to best serve EL students, the effects of immigration policies on students, and other equity issues in education.

As a testament to Monterrey's passion for equity and commitment to growth, North High School's bilingual classes and English Language Development (ELD) department have flourished since her arrival. When she came to North, the only bilingual class offered focused mainly on remedial homework help. In the six years since Monterrey began teaching at North, the number of bilingual faculty has doubled and there are now three levels of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes offered.

Monterrey also co-teaches a number of classes to provide bilingual support and assure that non-ESL classes (such as English 9) are facilitated in a culturally responsive manner. Demonstrating the growth of its ELD department, the school is one of the first in the state to offer Wisconsin Seal of Biliteracy awards to students who demonstrate advanced achievement in bilingualism, biliteracy, and sociocultural competence. North High School's ELD department serves as a model for the surrounding area. In a letter supporting Monterrey's nomination, a Bilingual/ESL Program Educator wrote that, in each role Monterrey has filled, she has "emerged as an innovator and creative collaborator and a go-to person for other educators ... in other buildings and courses across the district."

Monterrey moved to North High School after spending four years at South High School—also in Waukesha—as an EL teacher. Her previous teaching experience was in Whitewater at Whitewater High and Whitewater Middle/High School. She received both her Bachelor's Degree in Education and her master's from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

As Wisconsin's National Teacher of the Year representative, Monterrey will receive \$6,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation. She was one of five educators named to the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program in the spring to represent the 2018-19 teaching corps. The others are Benjamin Grignon, a

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teacher of traditional Menominee crafts at Menominee Indian High School, who shared the title of High School Teacher of the Year with Monterrey; Liz Gulden, a kindergarten teacher at Willson Elementary in Baraboo, Elementary School Teacher of the Year; Maggie McHugh of Sparta, a sixth-grade teacher and advisor at the La Crosse Design Institute, Middle School Teacher of the Year; and Michael Wilson, a school counselor at St. Croix Falls High School, Special Services Teacher of the Year.

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 2019.

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NOTES: Video footage of Sarahí Monterrey, Wisconsin's representative to the National Teacher of the Year program, is available on the Department of Public Instruction YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/umnB9dCTTaE>. This news release is available electronically at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2018-62.pdf>.