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Chad Sperzel-Wuchterl named 2020 High School Teacher of the Year

Herb Kohl Educational Foundation gives \$3,000 award

MADISON – In a surprise ceremony today, Chad Sperzel-Wuchterl of Milwaukee, an art teacher at Reagan High School in Milwaukee Public Schools, was named Wisconsin's 2020 High School Teacher of the Year.

State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor made the announcement during an all-school assembly. As part of the Teacher of the Year honor, Sperzel-Wuchterl will receive \$3,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

"Every day, teachers work to help students gain confidence, skills, and knowledge so they can contribute successfully to our world," said State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor. "It's such a pleasure to meet with educators who represent the best of this tremendous calling."

Herb Kohl, philanthropist, businessman, and co-sponsor of the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program through his educational foundation, said he supports the program because "I want to help teachers pursue their unrealized goals for their classroom, their school, or their professional development."

Sperzel-Wuchterl calls education "a vibrant, ongoing, lifelong process that interweaves the individual within a greater community." His students' artwork has been displayed throughout that greater community, not only in the school but also in university campus art galleries, the Wisconsin Capitol, the Milwaukee Art Museum, and revolving displays in Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward.

Sperzel-Wuchterl infuses college experiences throughout the curriculum by collaborating with professors from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design and the Minneapolis College of Art Design to provide lessons, workshops, and even professional critiques of student work. For students, an added benefit of working with professors on critiques and revision is learning about financial support for college. "Last year alone, \$3.5 million was offered to 41 of my seniors as scholarships were put forth to draw in talented artists to multiple universities," Sperzel-Wuchterl says. Students also make an annual visit to the University

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of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, where they participate in art workshops and learn about college options and scholarships from admissions staff.

Working against what he calls the “‘starving artist’ misconception,” Sperzel-Wuchterl invites parents to attend the campus visits to learn about college affordability, scholarships, and the wide array of careers available for students with art degrees.

Another hallmark of Sperzel-Wuchterl's philosophy is his belief in the intrinsic motivation to learn. “My experience has been that the more I empower students, the more excited they become in the learning process. I think this approach is essential as it lays the groundwork for independent learning which is expected at the college level and also paves the way for life-long learning.”

A major tenet of his teaching practice includes a focus on closing the achievement gap. Sperzel-Wuchterl embeds literacy within his visual arts classes and uses ACT data to better understand his students’ literacy-related strengths and areas in need of improvement. He is then able to tailor literacy-infused art lessons to support students reading about and analyzing art and art theory, describing their artistic processes, explaining their work to professors and other professional artists, listening to critiques, and writing their reflections. Students also develop valuable collaboration skills in many creative projects and work with diverse media to develop existing talents and build new skills.

Students embrace a global mindset. “Our student population includes 31 different cultures, some of whom are immigrants, refugees, or first-generation Americans,” Sperzel-Wuchterl notes. “Every culture has a unique perspective to share with the world at large.” A partnership with artists in residence and the international project, Inside Out, resulted in portraits of the school's culturally diverse students and staff appearing on the exterior of Reagan High School. Sperzel-Wuchterl also features, in his classroom and around the school, artworks by marginalized people.

Even while working tirelessly to widen students’ experiences and opportunities, Sperzel-Wuchterl’s belief in education as a lifelong process remains at the center of his own development. In his professional learning, he says he has witnessed an increasing “openness, adaptability, and flexibility” in education; he dreams of facilitating even more collaboration, to “knock down the rigid silos ... separating truly gifted educators from each other and limiting their professional development.”

Sperzel-Wuchterl began teaching at Reagan High School, which offers an International Baccalaureate program, in 2004. He holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in visual arts from Cardinal Stritch University.

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