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## Chelsea Miller named 2020 Elementary Teacher of the Year

*Herb Kohl Educational Foundation gives \$3,000 award*

MADISON – In a surprise ceremony today, Chelsea Miller of Jefferson, an art teacher at Sullivan and West elementary schools in the Jefferson School District, was named Wisconsin's 2020 Elementary 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, Miller 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."

In her teaching and extracurricular leadership, Chelsea Miller combines compassion with art. She understands each student as unique and able to change the world, and she aspires to influence those around her in a positive way.

"I believe that children who are taught to add beauty to the world are less likely to destroy it and that teaching kindness matters," she said. Art class is so much more than art in Miller's world. From becoming trauma-informed to teaching specific art techniques, Miller works with students and the community to make meaningful, lasting connections. Art history, fine motor skills, and technique get attention, but so do cross-content instruction, problem-solving, questioning, and teamwork.

In Miller's schools, poverty and homelessness are major concerns for many students. "Foundationally, increasing my knowledge on the subject is important, so I'm facilitating a book study about disrupting the cycle of poverty. Since beginning the study, I've learned that challenging our own stereotypes

(more)

may be one of the biggest hurdles facing educators." Miller works hard to hold the same high, rigorous standards for all students, even when modifying lessons to meet individual needs.

Miller leads and participates in many extracurricular activities and programming, focused on arts, community engagement, or both. She created the Crochet Club to simultaneously teach a skill and connect students with community volunteers and organizations. Everything the students create is donated to places like the Humane Society of Jefferson County, Jefferson Fire and EMT, Fort Hospital, and Rainbow Hospice.

At the Construction Club that Miller hosts weekly, students from multiple grades build, play, and complete challenges. Miller noticed the struggle to keep books in students' hands during the summer months and worked with a local builder who donated several little libraries for students to decorate and help install in places where kids would have easy access.

She also hosts the Stained Glass Club and organizes the Veteran's Day assembly each year, with music, thank you cards, and educational visits to classrooms from the 484th Army band. In addition to leading these activities, she aspires to establish a Mosaic Club, along with a community-wide art project. Continuing her own professional learning factors into these aspirations.

Students in Miller's classes are sometimes provided access and opportunities to work with art media that are not commonly offered at the elementary level. She wants to learn more about using tools they already have to expand offerings, including learning to fuse glass. "I know this is possible in my kiln, but I would need to learn how through a class. We could use the fused pieces to add detail to our finished mosaic work." Dreaming big and sharing her passion for art and life in general are major threads in her teaching, and Miller feels fortunate to work in a school district that encourages these traits.

She is also grateful for support, from administrators and beyond, for arts education, social and emotional learning, and working to reach every child. Building relationships with families, staff, local media, and other community members is the key to creating a positive impact, she finds – even, or especially, now, when Miller feels it's both "a challenging time to be a teacher" and "a tough time to be a parent."

"We need parents and community members to feel like they're part of the team. We need to bring back the village."

Miller holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh and is currently working toward a Masters in Educational Leadership from the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater.

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