



Frankford math teacher up for presidential award

By Cristen Perkowski, Staff Writer

(Created: Wednesday, April 4, 2007 11:24 PM CDT)

As Kathy Letchworth's students begin their unit on probability, it's more than a matter of keeping track of coin tosses.

Using hands-on activities and creating story lines for problems is a crucial way to engage her students, Letchworth said.

"Math is developmental, and each child's ability to reason is different," said Letchworth, a Frankford Middle School math teacher. "I think the best part of my job is when a student is really struggling with a concept and they finally understand. They're so much more appreciative of understanding."

She's been an educator for 32 years, nine in Plano Independent School District, and is one of three state finalists for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching.

She was nominated by Jim Wohlgelegen, PISD math coordinator for secondary curriculum and instruction.

Frankford Middle School Principal Susan Modisette has worked with Letchworth since the school opened in 1998 and said she is the "perfect" person for the award,

"When you go into her room, you realize she's really teaching kids what the question is and not what the answer is. So, they're learning what problem solving is and not just rote math facts," Modisette said. "She creates such an atmosphere of comfort that students that aren't even strong in math aren't afraid of trying."

Award officials said honorees are expected to be announced by the White House at the end of April.

Each year, up to 108 teachers are selected for the award. Recipients receive a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation.

In addition to the grant, recipients also receive gifts from program sponsors and a paid trip for two May 14-19 to meet the president and receive the award.

"(The prize) is so big, I'm not even penciling the date in my personal calendar," Letchworth said.

Modisette is more than a little optimistic about the math teacher's chances for winning the award.

"I'm sure that the other candidates are highly qualified. But, I personally can't imagine that there's anyone better than Kathy Letchworth," Modisette said.

Letchworth said she has known she wanted to be a teacher since she was in sixth grade. As the first-born, Letchworth would go home and teach her siblings. And even though she enjoyed math, she struggled with the subject, which inspired her to teach.

"I enjoy working with the kids, trying to make math more meaningful and fun," Letchworth said.

This year, Letchworth teaches a regular sixth-grade math class and a double-block remedial math course, as well as seventh and eighth-grade AVID classes.

"She has such a creative environment in her classrooms," Modisette said. "The level of questioning and understanding that her students have at such a young age is just inspiring to watch."

During her first year to teach college preparation elective AVID - Advancement via Individual Determination - she was selected as one of nine school coordinators in during the district's first year to host the national program.

"I love it. It's so different from anything else, and I really think some of the kids come alive with it," Letchworth said. "I've been teaching for 32 years now, so this is a new challenge. You don't want to get set in your ways."

Modisette said Letchworth's devotion doesn't stop in the classroom. After she organized a coat/jacket drive this year, Letchworth found a way to personalize the community service for students.

"She scheduled a field trip on a Saturday to hand deliver coats and jackets in downtown Dallas. So students physically found someone to give the jackets we collected," Modisette said. "She's the kind of worker that's always up and cheering everyone else on, even though she's probably worked a 14-hour day and is exhausted. But, you'd never know that."

Letchworth said she was "humbled" by being selected as a finalist for the award. Even though she feels like a strict teacher most of the time, Letchworth said she has "good rapport" with her students.

"Kathy's the one that comes to the school social and is out on the floor dancing with the kids and having a blast," Modisette said.

Contact staff writer Cristen Perkowski at 972-398-4263 or cperkowski@acnpapers.com.

Copyright © 2007 Star Community Newspapers

624 Krona Drive Suite 170, Plano, Texas 75074 - Contact Star Community Newspapers at 972-398-4200
