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Liz Gulden named 2019 Elementary Teacher of the Year

Baraboo educator to receive \$3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON – In a surprise ceremony at her school today, Elizabeth (Liz) Gulden, a kindergarten teacher at Willson Elementary School in Baraboo, was named Wisconsin’s 2019 Elementary School Teacher of the Year.

State Superintendent Tony Evers made the announcement during an all-school assembly. As part of the Teacher of the Year honor, Gulden will receive \$3,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

“Our teachers wear many hats, yet their dedication to children is constant,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “From the classroom to the conference room to the community, they focus on our kids and their education. It is an honor to recognize educators who do so much for Wisconsin’s students and our public schools.”

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.”

Gulden turns to Mary Poppins as a role model, sharing the character’s belief that “In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun.” Her classroom is an active and collaborative teaching and learning environment where students “are in a constant state of fun.” She motivates and inspires her students’ love of learning by practicing and learning along with them. “We read, write, solve math problems, and research new ideas together,” she said.

She spearheaded what became a districtwide initiative to accelerate the number of sight words kindergarteners master before the end of the school year. Each new sight word is introduced verbally, added to the word wall, and spelled kinesthetically so multiple senses are involved in learning. With the addition of video recordings of students and staff members spelling words with their bodies for continued practice and review at home, kindergarten achievement data shows most students recognize 75 to 100

(more)

sight words by the end of the school year and have improved reading achievement on standardized assessments.

At the beginning of one recent school year, Gulden had 43 percent of her class that started below grade-level. By working with the school principal and district reading specialists, she improved her guided reading practices, worked with struggling students, and explored materials to include in book boxes and other research-based interventions to ensure these students were ready to move to first grade along with their peers. A former student noted how her teacher sent home books and math and writing activities in English and Spanish so her dual-language family could support learning at home. When it was time for parent teacher conferences, the student was surprised when Mrs. Gulden spoke to her mother in Spanish. “I know my family appreciated her effort during my time with her,” the student said.

Gulden’s efforts at inclusiveness include restructuring Math Night to incorporate games from around the world, asking a grandparent to share games from the Ho-Chunk Nation, and bringing in parents, grandparents, and community leaders in to the classroom to support student learning.

She addresses the increased emphasis on STEAM (science, technology , engineering, arts, and mathematics) through lessons that have students construct houses for the three little pigs that can withstand the huffing and puffing of the wolf, and competing with Lego cars, teaching foundational science and math concepts while developing social and teamwork skills.

Gulden has served as a peer coach and mentor, taking an active role to guide new educators in their first years and assisting veteran teachers in refining their teaching practice. She is a leader in educator effectiveness and guiding her peers in the use of data to set individual student goals and incorporate literacy learning into more facets of the school day. She championed the Playground Fundraising Committee, which held events to raise money to replace and upgrade playground equipment that benefits the school and community.

Gulden earned her National Board Certification in 2017 and was named the district’s Elementary Teacher of the Year in 2013. She has been with the Baraboo School District since 2005, teaching at the West Kindergarten Center prior to working at Willson Elementary School. She holds a bachelor’s degree in early childhood and a master’s degree in professional development, both from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. She earlier earned an associate’s degree from the University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County.

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