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Honoring our teachers

By Dr. Susan Salcido, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools

This week marks a very special celebration for teachers in our schools: It is Teacher Appreciation Week, and teachers all over our county and state will be recognized by parents, families, and the community for their excellent and inspirational work in our local classrooms.

The timing is especially appropriate: last week we announced that Mandi de Witte, science teacher at Carpinteria High School, will serve as the 2019 Santa Barbara County Teacher of the Year. She is a remarkable individual who inspires students and colleagues alike, and will do a particularly excellent job in representing all of our outstanding teachers countywide.

We also announced the winners of the annual Crystal Apple awards for excellence in our schools, the Performing Arts Teacher of the Year, and the Heart of Education Award, an inaugural award named after Bill Cirone, our recently retired County Superintendent of Schools. It is a true privilege to watch these professionals excel at their work, and to be able to introduce them to community members and share the difference they make for all our children.

To all of our teachers, we say thank you, in the strongest voice possible. You shoulder an enormous range of responsibilities that seem to grow every year. From addressing safety concerns, to providing social and emotional support, from planning content-specific lessons, to using technology to advance the learning, you do it all for every one of our students, who depend on your skill, professionalism, and energy every day. We all thank you.

Our school year has been full of change and difficulties. We are implementing new standards and assessments. We have faced school closures and disasters. We have a changing federal education system and a new state education system. We are doing all we can to keep up with the pace of change. And through it all, I have an immeasurable amount of hope for our future because of our inspirational teachers.

Mandi de Witte, our 2019 Santa Barbara County Teacher of the Year, is one example of this hope. She put it perfectly by saying, “An outstanding teacher believes every single child can learn, brings joy to learning, and motivates each student to be their best inside and outside the classroom.”

“I am a teacher because I love education, but every child does not; indeed many students have become disenfranchised by school. My core mission as a teacher is to ignite the spark of curiosity in each student and give them confidence to question, explore, and enjoy learning,” she said.

“Students who are confident, hopeful, and empowered give rise to secure, thoughtful, and compassionate community members. My ultimate goal for all students is to teach them how to learn, and to love doing it – irrespective of the subject matter.”

“Astrophysicist Neal deGrasse Tyson captured my feelings well, saying, ‘Good education is not what fills your head with facts, but what stimulates curiosity. You then learn the rest of your life.’”

“Whether my students can recount the structure and function of all cellular organelles 10 years from now matters little to me,” Mandi concludes. “What I care about is fostering a sense of wonder and analytical ability so they never stop learning.”

Her words speak to the enormous responsibility of our teachers. The professionals who undertake these challenges deserve our respect, our support, and our acknowledgment of the difference they make in our communities, our society at large, and our nation as a whole. Teachers’ roles are vital, and we are honored to recognize their critically important accomplishments during Teacher Appreciation Week.

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