

Chippewa Valley Schools earns Best of the Best Teacher honors

By Jane Peterson
For MediaNews Group

Whether it's a big smile from a student, a compliment from a parent or a thank you from a graduate, there are many ways families can acknowledge teachers for the hard work they do every day to educate local youth and keep communities strong.

With Teacher Appreciation Week celebrated the first full week in May, The Macomb Daily decided to recognize area educators who give it their all day in and day out. Readers were asked to vote for their favorite district's teachers, honoring them all for their important contributions.

In second and third place were Anchor Bay School District and New Haven Community Schools, respectively.

Topping the list of vote-getters was the Chippewa Valley Schools and its staff of 814 teachers. Superintendent Ronald Roberts was pleased to hear this news, but not surprised.

"We have dedicated teachers that always go the extra mile for students," he said. "They have a ton of initiative that they use to create opportunities for kids."

He said three teachers, for example, are collecting new books so when school starts in the fall, every first grader will receive a book with an inscription from the giver that offers an inspirational message. He also talked about the district's LEGO Robotics program, which was started by teachers in one building, then organically spread throughout the district. The club focuses on engineering, math skills and team building skills.

Teachers typically work long hours, but for many the profession is more of a calling than it is a job. Teacher Appreciation Week



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHIPPEWA VALLEY SCHOOLS

Chippewa Valley Schools named three Outstanding Teachers of the Year for 2020-21: Kathleen Myers (left), an eighth grade teacher at Wyandot Middle School; Jessica Downham (center), a science teacher at Chippewa Valley High School; and Kathleen Rimmel (right), a kindergarten teacher at Erie Elementary.

is an opportunity for families and the community in general to reflect on the major impact educators have on students of all ages. This past year has been especially unique with the COVID-19 pandemic stretching the ability of teachers to quickly adapt, adjust and continue to maneuver between constantly changing delivery methods, from virtual and live streaming to hybrid models and in-person learning. Sometimes teachers moved between two or more of these methods in the same day, but despite the added challenges, they always prioritized student learning.

Many teachers went above and beyond during the health crisis. Most needed to completely reconfigure their lesson plans. A science teacher who once utilized

hands-on assignments and experiments to help students grasp specific concepts now had to restructure her teaching method so students could learn virtually from home, for example.

Other teachers participated on committees to provide guidance to elected leaders, volunteered to deliver meals to families, offered additional online learning opportunities after class, completed home visits to get young children excited about school and made phone calls to continue to support, nurture and mentor students.

At Chippewa Valley, students have learned within a variety of models during the 2020-21 school year: Remote, hybrid, full-time in-person learning, a virtual academy and live streamed classes.

Next year the district plans to offer traditional face-to-face learning for all students in addition to its popular Chippewa Valley Virtual Academy for those seeking an all-remote option taught by Chippewa Valley teachers.

Roberts said teachers often reach out to students to address their individual needs. He said they understand that a one-size-fits-all solution doesn't always make sense, so teachers go out of the way to provide personal service and make a difference.

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WAYS TO GIVE BACK

Best of the Best Teacher recognition is a great honor for Chippewa Valley Schools, but if students wish to share appreciation for their own teachers, here are a few simple suggestions, whether they are learning face-to-face or virtually:

- Draw a picture
- Sing a song
- Craft a note that starts with "thank you for ...," "I appreciate you because ..." or "you've made a huge impact in my life after ..."
- Send a small e-gift card for coffee
- Arrange for lunch delivery
- Send a digital greeting card
- Make a charity donation in their name

science teacher at Chippewa Valley High School.

Rimmel believes that building relationships with her students is just as important as academics in order to be engaged in their learning, stay curious and explore the world around them. She can often be spotted at her students' extra-curricular activities.

For Myers, children learn best when they feel safe to share their ideas and questions, so she focuses on creating a community in her classroom. She offers one-on-one support to students who need assistance and encourages all learners to challenge themselves.

Downham focuses on creating lifelong learners, inspiring them to want to learn more beyond the classroom. She understands the need to prepare students for their futures so they can flourish and achieve the goals they have set for themselves.