

Governor's Educators of the Year 2020-2021



Bear Tavern is thrilled to announce that our 2020-2021 Governor's Educator of the Year is Mrs. Betsy Finnegan.

What makes Mrs. Finnegan special is not what she does, but the manner in which she does it. She is one of the most dependable and thoughtful individuals that we know and can always solve a problem with grace and kindness, making everyone feel valued and special. She is a uniter, who can garner support for any project, who has the innate ability to lead people, while not being afraid to roll up her sleeves and work.

Some of Mrs. Finnegan's nominators pointed out that, "She is dedicated to the Bear Tavern community in every way imaginable. There is no one more deserving of this award," and "Mrs. Finnegan cares about our school, our students and our community.

She goes above and beyond the classroom by helping wherever she is needed in our school."

We could not be more proud of Mrs. Finnegan or grateful to her many contributions to our school!

We are proud to announce and celebrate Hopewell Elementary School's recipient of the Governor's Teacher Award, Mrs. Vikki Obst.

Mrs. Obst is our technology teacher who not only provides support to hundreds of students but is regularly found going above and beyond to assist our staff.

During this pandemic, she has worked non-stop. We are humbled by her desire and ability to connect with the entire school population on a regular basis to not only educate her students, but provide them with a daily reminder of how much she cares for each and everyone of them.



Please join us in congratulating a teacher who truly transforms lives, Hopewell Elementary School's recipient of the Governor's Teacher Award, Mrs. Vikki Obst



Stony Brook Elementary School is proud to announce Mrs. Khara Levy as the 2020-21 Governor's Educator of the Year award recipient. Mrs. Levy is a graduate of Rider University's School of Education and first joined the HVRSD staff in 2004. She made a wonderful first impression with her students, parents and her colleagues through her creativity, organization and professionalism. Khara stepped away from the classroom to be home with her children in 2008. In 2013, the stars and planets aligned - we had an opening at Stony Brook and Khara Levy was ready to return. We were elated to have her back. In the 8 years since her return, Khara has continued to shine among our All Star staff.

"Our Stony Brook Family is made better and stronger by having Khara as a part of it"

Congratulations Mrs. Levy!

It is my pleasure to announce Ashton Sands, from Toll Gate Grammar School, as our 2020-2021 Governor's Educator of the Year award winner!

Ms. Sands came to Hopewell Valley in 2012 and began her career as a paraprofessional in the IPI classroom, working with our youngest special education students and as a Kindergarten Extension Teacher. She has since fulfilled a wide variety of assignments within the department including in-class resource, resource room, and special class. Miss Sands also became the head high school cheerleading coach in 2017. She is an exceptional model for inclusivity and a positive approach to varsity cheerleading.



The comments from parents and staff speak to Ashton's caring and nurturing manner which is why she has been so successful this year as Toll Gate's first PEECH teacher.

Toll Gate is so lucky to have Ashton Sands. Please join me in congratulating Ms. Sands on this great honor.



Math can often be a difficult subject for students, but Tammy Pegrem approaches instruction in a way that students not only learn the concepts, but develop confidence. As one student said in the nomination, "She is an excellent math teacher and a great person. She has taught us to always try our best and always helps when we need it. She makes math fun."

Beyond math instruction, Tammy plays an integral role in helping our sixth grade students adjust to a new school. Her patient, kind and caring manner helps make her students instantly feel comfortable as they learn to navigate middle school.

It is a treat to visit Tammy's Classroom. It is a nurturing environment where all students are engaged in learning. It is a pleasure to watch her students develop independence and confidence. There is differentiation and creativity, but mostly a feeling of fun and love.

Congratulations Mrs. Pegrem!

Carolyn McGrath is a talented visual arts educator who has had a positive impact on thousands of students during her time at Hopewell Valley Central High School. She encourages the individual development of her students by enabling them to relate art to the world around them. From drawing portraits of animals to raising money for an animal shelter, to creating tapestry pieces in the style of artists in other countries, Ms. McGrath is adept at creating projects that allow her students to make meaningful connections between the curriculum and more global concepts.

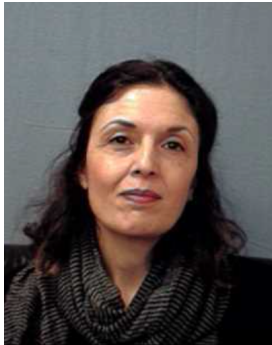


Ms. McGrath's passion for education extends beyond the classroom through her involvement in student activities such as the Photography Club, the Re-Imagine Club, and SPECTRUM; she is described as "having an open door and an open heart to whatever need may arise". Her ability to connect with

a wide range of students is widely recognized; her colleagues laud her ability to inspire “despite barriers in language, ability, behavior, and otherwise.”

It is a pleasure to recognize Carolyn McGrath as the HVCHS Governor’s Educator of the Year.

Support Professionals of the Year



Melina Guarino is a paraprofessional in the autism program at Bear Tavern Elementary and has been with the District since 2018. She is an incredibly hard worker, who is not afraid to put her all into every task that she does. Melina makes everyone around her better and has become an absolutely indispensable part of our program. She brings the best out of every child with whom she works and is a creative, flexible and dedicated member of our team. She is humble, reliable and consistently works for the best interests of every child in her class. Melina is a special person and an incredible paraprofessional. Please help me to congratulate her on this recognition.

Stanley (“Ken”) Bialota has been with the District for 26 years serving as a tradesperson/carpenter in our Maintenance Department. Ken is a dedicated member of the District staff, ensuring our building structures are safe and secure for the school community. Ken went above and beyond this past summer, working diligently to produce all of the PPE that is found in our schools and classrooms. His colleagues have much respect for him, stating, “He does his best, and with a smile.” He “gave up weekends to make sure the classrooms had what was needed prior to the first day.” With “lots of requests, without any complaints; [he] just went to work to get what was needed done!” Thank you Ken!



Jason Bowers is also a member of the Maintenance Department, and has been with the District since 2006. Jason started as a groundskeeper, taking pride in the beautification of our schools’ grounds, before moving to the Maintenance Department. He is always polite and respectful with anyone he works with and always does his best to get the job done. His colleagues remark that “Jason goes above and beyond with special requests from staff all year long.” “He has been making custom plexiglass barriers for staff and students so they feel comfortable returning to work and school.” We thank Jason for his efforts!