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Maplewood Educator Named Recipient of $15,000 Award for Excellence

Judith Bartel, a teacher at Hill-Murray School in Maplewood, was surprised with the news that she is a recipient of a 2021 WEM Outstanding Educator Award, an honor that is accompanied by a $15,000 award.

Bartel is one of six educators being honored by the WEM Foundation and Synergy & Leadership Exchange for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student learning. She is one of two recipients of the Ethics in Education award, which recognizes educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies, or curriculum.

Bartel has been teaching for 31 years and currently teaches middle and high school social science. In keeping things relevant, this fall she created a unit on the coronavirus. She had students research the science behind the virus. They compared the death and infection rates of previous pandemics, and examined the social, economic and moral implications. Together they learned how to determine if a source is credible and non-biased. Bartel views this type of project as a challenge for her students to learn how to draw their own conclusions from factual information based on reliable sources versus relying on social media opinions.

“Judy's curriculum is full of examples of character-building activities in which the students are expected to examine their values and their moral compass,” said Erin Herman, principal. “Her goal is to help create strong, ethical, servant leaders for our ever-changing world. And her willingness to think outside the box provides her students with the best possible experience.”

In addition, she serves as faculty advisor to the student group, Students 4 Change. This group seeks to create a safe and collaborative space in the school community for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, members of different faiths, and others who may be marginalized. The group creates advisory lessons that will allow for students to teach their peers about the effects of hate. They are also conducting a speaker’s series for students, parents and community members. The goal of all these activities is to help students, faculty and other adults understand how to make marginalized students feel known, loved and respected. The group has grown to over 60 students!

“Ms. Bartel knows her students and that is why I believe she is continuously successful when she teaches,” said a former student. “She pushed us to think critically in her classes. It was a balance of joy and learning. However, the biggest lesson I learned from her was how to be an empathetic citizen of the world.”

In addition to the Ethics in Education Award, honorees are recognized with the Academic Challenge Coach Award (teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges approved by the Minnesota Academic League Council), Teacher Achievement Award (exemplary teachers who support, inspire and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement) and Athletic Coach Award (teachers who are exemplary coaches of athletic teams).

Educators are first nominated for the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program by students, parents, colleagues or community members. Those who accept the nomination provide additional information for consideration by Synergy & Leadership Exchange and a blue ribbon selection panel, which reviews and ranks the nominees. In addition to the six statewide honorees, additional educators have been selected as regional honorees for 2021.

Synergy & Leadership Exchange is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering collaboration to advance the development of ethical citizens, providing educational resources, and celebrating achievement and best practices in Minnesota schools, businesses and communities. For more information on the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards and Synergy & Leadership Exchange, visit [www.synergyexchange.org](http://www.synergyexchange.org).