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Sleepy Eye Educator Named Recipient of $15,000 Award for Excellence

Mary Hoffmann, a teacher at Sleepy Eye High School in Sleepy Eye, 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.

Hoffmann 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 Teacher Achievement Award, which recognizes exemplary teachers who support, inspire and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement.

Hoffmann has been teaching for 26 years and currently teaches high school agriculture. In addition, Hoffmann is the FFA advisor, an extracurricular student organization for those interested in agriculture and leadership. She has developed a variety of new courses in her tenure and grown the program from herself being the only Agriculture Science teacher part-time to now three full-time positions. Securing grant money for the Sleepy Eye Ag. department, including FFA, is another priority for her, having applied for and received more than $88,000 for Ag. program expenses. In addition to the grants, she has helped to secure more than $200,000 through local donations. It is through these funding sources that her students can afford to attend FFA events, conferences, conventions, and Ag. career exploration activities throughout the years, as well as have the technology and resources needed in the Ag. classrooms and shops.

“Mrs. Hoffmann is the most influential teacher, mentor and friend I have had over the past 10 years,” said a former student. “She is an engaged, passionate teacher, and her impact has and will continue to be felt far beyond the boundaries of her classroom!”

Living to serve is the last line of the FFA motto, but it is what Hoffmann wants her students to think of first in their lives. Through her classes, students develop communication, teamwork, decision-making, and relationship building skills. With the numerous activities and programs that Sleepy Eye Agriculture students and FFA members take part in, Hoffmann instills in her students that they should take every opportunity to help others, teach others and to serve others. From helping with food redistribution lines, making inspirational signs, helping with the weekend food program, and packing school supplies for the United Way, these are only a few of the ways Hoffmann shows her students what they can do for others.

“Mrs. Hoffmann and her FFA group have been our secret weapon in helping us run a successful food program,” shared a community member. Mary does not wait to be asked. She calls and volunteers. Her ability to motivate students and her commitment to their overall development is apparent in the work she does and in the students’ participation in the community.”

In addition to the Teacher Achievement Award, other educators are being honored with the Academic Challenge Coach Award (teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges), Ethics in Education Award (exemplary educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum) 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).