District 200 staff, volunteer honored by ISBE as ‘Those Who Excel’

For more than a decade, Debbie Schweihs has been the masterful matriarch of the District 200 band program instilling a passion for music from the first time students pick up an instrument in fifth grade.

Schweihs, the District 200 Elementary Band director, was among seven Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 employees and one volunteer honored Saturday, Oct. 20 by the Illinois State Board of Education at its Those Who Excel/Teacher of the Year banquet in Normal.

Fifth-grade Olson Elementary teacher Katie Jacobson has worked with Schweihs, whom the ISBE presented with an Award of Merit, both as a colleague and as Schweihs’s band student.

“Mrs. Schweihs goes above and beyond to promote the love of music for all students, including those with special needs. She works incredibly hard to ensure that all students reach their fullest musical potential,” Jacobson wrote in a recommendation letter.

Schweihs has been teaching band for 27 years. She also performs with a saxophone quartet and with the Woodstock City Band and as an educator has been focusing her expertise on beginners.

“I believe this was where I was meant to be,” Schweihs said. “As a band director, I believe all students deserve the opportunity to experience playing an instrument and explore their musical abilities.”

The Those Who Excel program recognizes individuals who’ve made outstanding contributions to their schools and communities. This year, 214 educators were recognized by a committee of statewide educators and former award winners.

District 200’s team of Lit/Tech Coaches was also presented with an ISBE Award of Merit, largely for its excellent work in guiding the District’s 1-to-1 technology program where each student is issued a laptop computer used for instruction, in addition to driving many educational initiatives.

The team is comprised of Kristen Sauber, Courtney Heeren, Shanon Laidig, and Marti Frisbie.

“They truly have made the best laid plans of our District come to life in the form of quality instruction,” Superintendent Mike Moan said.
Ryan Logsdon, head custodian at Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center, was also presented with an Award of Merit for his tireless work at one of the district’s largest schools that houses its smallest students.

“Ryan has the most positive attitude, and he is exceptional in dealing with the students, who love ‘Mr. Ryan.’ His door is covered with artwork given to him by the children,” said Michelle Martin, assistant principal at Verda Dierzen.

Cristina Aguilar, a second-grade dual language teacher at Mary Endres Elementary School, also earned the ISBE Award of Merit this year as an early career educator. Aguilar attended District 200 schools before attending college to pursue her education career.

“A natural ability to relate to children has made it easy for Cristina to develop a positive rapport with her students,” Mary Endres Principal Kery Pala said. “She puts forth her best effort every day and makes a huge difference in her students’ lives.”

Amy Perry, a school psychologist at Creekside Middle School, was presented with an ISBE Award of Recognition for her work with Creekside’s wide-ranging student population including many students with special needs and disabilities.

“Having a child who struggles in specific areas, whether academically, behaviorally, socially or emotionally, can be hard on families. Mrs. Perry works to develop a relationship with parents and takes their perspectives into account when delivering information,” Creekside Principal Michael Wheatley said.

District 200 also had a community volunteer recognized with a Those Who Excel Award of Excellence. Roger Oberman, a retired District 200 teacher, spent three to five hours a day assisting in first-grade classrooms at Dean Street Elementary.

“No matter what role Roger has played in the District, his ability to work with people, care about and teach children, and always keep our students first has made him invaluable to our District and, most importantly, to the children of our community,” Superintendent Mike Moan said.

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