



Music teacher earns National Board Certification

Veteran elementary school music teacher Dawn Firak took her career up an octave earning National Board Certification — the most prestigious credential a teacher can achieve.

Firak, who is based at Prairiewood Elementary School but has taught at several schools across Woodstock Community Unit School District 200, has been bringing song to classrooms for 12 years. The Board of Education honored Firak for her achievement at its Jan. 8 meeting.

She said she sought the certification for her growth and development as a professional and said the two-year certification process was well worth her time. It required a considerable amount of self-evaluation on her classroom work along with peer review.

“I wanted to reflect on my teaching and hone my skills. I just wanted to take the time to better prepare myself as an educator for my students,” Firak said.

The certification is administered by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, an independent, non-profit organization formed in 1987 to advance the quality of teaching and learning in the nation’s schools. Three other current teachers in District 200 have also earned National Board Certification over the years: science teacher Marcy Buchanan, Woodstock High School world languages teacher Linda Radke and physical education teacher Melinda Etnyre.

Firak, who also teaches music at McHenry County College, said one of the biggest benefits of the certification process was the reaffirmation that she was meant to be a music teacher.

“Teaching is in my blood, in my heart and my soul. I learned that this is the right field for me. This is who I am,” Firak said.

She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois and master’s degree from Northern Illinois University. Firak said it’s important that music remain a part of school curriculum especially in this age of technology because music teaches us joy and how to be human.

She’s particularly enjoyed teaching music in District 200 because the school district and its parents have a great appreciation for encouraging musical talent.

“They are the key to keeping this music program vital and vibrant and such a big part of this Woodstock community,” Firak said.

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