

Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Two D 200 teachers named McHenry County Educators of the Year

The McHenry County Regional Office of Education has recognized two outstanding Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 teachers as McHenry County Educators of the Year.

Ashley Buckingham, a fifth-grade teacher at Westwood Elementary School, and Julie Zay, a preschool teacher at Greenwood Elementary School, received the honor May 6 at a Crystal Lake event.

The annual awards are granted in partnership with the Community Foundation for McHenry County to recognize the county's best teachers, administrators and support staff, Regional Superintendent Diana Hartmann said.

District 200 Superintendent Mike Moan congratulated the winners and all of the District 200 nominees who also attended the event.

"Our schools are filled with dedicated professionals who always put children first while striving to help our students become everything they can be. Ms. Buckingham and Ms. Zay both exemplify those traits, and we're extremely proud of them for earning this honor," Moan said.

Buckingham was recognized in the category of Early Career Educator. She has been teaching for five years. In addition to her normal teaching duties, Buckingham has worked in the District's after-school literacy programs with students in second through fifth grades.

Westwood Principal Ryan Hart said Buckingham is an outstanding collaborator who works hard on her professional growth in addition to her remarkable ability to connect with students.

"She is always brainstorming ways she can make the content more personal for her students while putting her own spin on it," Hart said. "Once she has her students' interest and buy-in, she has an uncanny ability to step back and let her students take the wheel."

Zay was selected as the preschool Educator of the Year. Greenwood Principal Julie Smith said Zay is remarkable in working with students on their school readiness and social skills using large and small groups as well as individual activities for her students.

"She is so dedicated to her preK students," Smith said. "She engages students through song, movement, and text. She encourages her students to talk about their feelings, and she helps them navigate social situations."