Denae Kessel Dostal receives Excellence in Teaching Award

Huntington - Denae Kessel Dostal has been selected by the Gateway Regional School District as their 2018 Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award winner. Dostal has been a member of the Gateway teaching community as a physical education teacher at Littleville Elementary and the Middle School for nearly ten years. Her success at Gateway goes beyond teaching; outside of the classroom (or gym), she coaches the high school girls’ cross country team. She holds a Master of Science degree in Exercise Science, is currently a PhD. candidate in Health Sciences (both through California University of Pennsylvania) and has been a personal training/group fitness instructor in the Pioneer Valley for 12 years.

“I love teaching because I still remember the teachers who inspired me: Ruth Moffatt Upton’s teaching made me truly love school. I remember being so excited for her read aloud of the Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe every day…and Rich O’Neil, my elementary PE teacher who planted the seeds of encouragement that made me believe that one day I could be an athlete and run marathons,” Dostal posted on social media just before the awards dinner. She also named Anne Stuck (her high school Latin teacher) and Marlene Altobello, “whose high level of teaching English and writing paved the way for the page after page of writing for my doctorate.”

“There are many more. I am forever thankful for these amazing teachers!”

Teachers are selected on the following criteria: a certified Massachusetts teacher; proficient or exemplary ratings on their evaluation; respected by peers, students and parents; demonstrates enthusiasm; demonstrates professionalism; and for reaching above and beyond the classroom and school walls.

Dostal was among those honored at a banquet for Excellence in Teaching Award winners at the Log Cabin in Holyoke on April 26. The program featured award presentations to individual winners from schools throughout Hampshire and Franklin Counties of Western Massachusetts. Winners received an engraved plaque and a check for $500, along with tuition incentives towards higher education courses, a membership at WGBY and local YMCAAs, and other gifts.

The keynote address at this year’s awards dinner was given by Dr. Seth Gemme, Gateway Regional High School Class of 2003. In his remarks, Gemme said, “My career path was not a typical one, but never would be what it is today if it were not for the educators who came along the way.” He spoke of his love of science in high school, and his original goal of becoming a meteorologist—sparked by Gateway teachers Jeff Samson and Cyndi Jensen, who competed with him each year to predict winter storms and snow days. In college, his attention then turned to mathematics (inspired by his Gateway AP Calculus teacher Cathy Stinson), that he said provided me “with the skills to be able to solve problems in an organized and meticulous way. Skills I need and use every day in the emergency department.” Gemme closed with, “I am grateful for all of those teachers that have led me down this winding but rewarding path. I will always look up to them and hope to pass the lessons I have learned on to not only my students and colleagues, but also my patients.”
This is the 16th year of the Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Awards, which has honored over 1,000 Western Massachusetts educators.

This awards program is made possible by the Harold Grinspoon Charitable foundation, the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation, and MassMutual Life Insurance Company. It was also made possible with the help of local businesses and community supporters.

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Photos (top, left to right): Superintendent David Hopson, Excellence in Teaching winner Denae Kessel Dostal, Harold Grinspoon, and Grinspoon Foundation CFO Patrick Geryk. (below) Dr. Seth Gemme, GRHS ’03, delivering the keynote speech at the awards dinner.