

Seaford educator named Delaware's 2019 Teacher of the Year

Dana Bowe becomes Delaware's nominee in national competition

An elementary special education teacher from the Seaford School District is Delaware's 2019 State Teacher of the Year.

Governor John Carney made the announcement tonight at the annual banquet honoring the 20 district and charter teachers of the year at Dover Downs Hotel and Conference Center in Dover.

Dana Bowe, who teaches kindergarten through second grade for the Sussex County Orthopedic Program at West Seaford Elementary School, now is Delaware's nominee for National Teacher of the Year, a title she hopes will allow her to share her message about all children's abilities.

One in six children in the United States has a developmental disability, ranging from speech or language impairments to intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy or autism.

"But all of these children have capabilities. Their value and worth are beyond measure. Each student has a different story, different journey, and different abilities," Bowe said.

After the Sussex Orthopedic Program moved to West Seaford Elementary School, Bowe helped start a "Spread the Word-Respect" campaign at her school, part of a national effort to discourage the use of the derogatory word "retard" and to promote acceptance, compassion, understanding, and inclusion of people with disabilities. This was important for the culture of the school, where some students had not before seen children walking in orthopedic braces, communicating with

speech generated devices, or using assistive technologies, she said.

“Sometimes it is difficult to see the initial impact of an initiative. Other times, although it is not blatantly obvious, there is a quiet victory: Students holding hands walking down the hallway; a child in a wheelchair tutoring other children in class; or a regular education student asking a child to be his partner even though they can communicate only through gestures, signs, or the use of a ‘talker,’ ” Bowe said.

Bowe said she also had the chance to witness “a big, loud victory.

“One of my students with Trisomy 18 ran into the middle of a heated basketball game against many of the boys who were much larger and tougher,” Bowe said. “She put her arms up to catch a rebound and was pushed aside by some of the bigger boys. The leader of the group, CJ, shouted, ‘Pass her to ball. She is in the game.’ They did. She didn’t make the shot, not even close. But she was open, and the boys kept her in the game. CJ stood up for her and changed lives that day; not just for my little basketball player but for many students. He became a leader by modeling acceptance and respect of others.”

Bowe, who has been teaching for 17 years including five in her current position, shared stories in her application about students who made significant progress in her class.

“Children with special needs are capable of love, friendship, and academic achievement. We must encourage true inclusion with acceptance and kindness. We must see our children without labels and limitations,” she said. “We must discover the greatness that is already inside them and share their greatness with others. We must teach all students.”

Bowe can be so effective because she also builds strong relationships with her students’ families.

Sometimes that means efforts that go beyond the work day – delivering a forgotten tooth that fell out at lunch to a child’s rural home so the Tooth Fairy can visit that night or sitting in the dunk tank at a local carnival to raise money for a student’s drug trial.

“We are partners,” Bowe said. “We become so close through text messages, phone calls, and home visits.”

Joni Smith, whose son is now in his third year in Bowe’s class, said Bowe cares about all her students and finds ways to engage each of them as well as their families in their learning.

“Mrs. Bowe always includes us in his progress and his struggles and is always right on board to help in any way,” Smith said. “She always makes us feel like family and friends – we are a team to work together to help our child progress.”

Bowe earned her bachelor’s degree in elementary education from East Carolina University and a master’s degree in special education from Wilmington University. She also was named the Down Syndrome Association of Delaware 2017 Teacher of the Year.

Bowe inherits from outgoing Teacher of the Year Jinni Forcucci the responsibility of representing all teachers in Delaware. She will address community groups, business leaders, legislators, and educational organizations to inform the public about the status of Delaware schools. She also will become Delaware’s candidate in the National Teacher of the Year Program, a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers sponsored by the Voya Foundation.

By action of the General Assembly, she will receive a \$5,000 grant to use for the educational benefit of her students, as well two personal grants totaling an additional \$5,000. The remaining 19 school district/charter candidates each will receive a personal grant of \$2,000. All 20 teachers also

receive a gift from Advantech Incorporated.

Bowe also will receive: a \$1,000 grant for educational/classroom use from American Institutes for Research; grants from the Delaware Association of School Administrators, Delaware State Education Association and the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce; a State of Delaware Teacher of the Year commemorative plate from the Division of Motor Vehicles; a full doctorate program from University of Delaware and Wilmington University; a gold watch from the Delaware State Teachers of the Year Association; a 10-karat gold ring from Jostens; and lunch in Washington D.C. with U.S. Sen. Tom Carper.

Other organizations that honored the newly-selected Teacher of the Year include: the Delaware Chief School Officers Association, Delaware School Boards Association and Educators Rising.

This year's celebration was sponsored in part by Voya Financial.

Find last night's press release [here](#).

Find photos from last night's celebration [here](#).

Find the video presentation on all 20 teachers shared last night [here](#).

Find the classroom photos of all 20 nominees shared last night as well as portrait shots of each teacher [here](#).

For media interviews with Dana Bowe, please contact Duncan.Smith@seaford.k12.de.us.

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