



Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching

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News Release

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Local Teacher Recognized for Outstanding Teaching Innovation

Science Teacher from Grovetown Middle School Selected as 2005 Presidential Award State Finalist

Awardees Announced in March 2006

Washington, DC – Did your teacher ever take you to a theme park or use a model of a rollercoaster to teach physics concepts in class, allow you to learn fractions and angles by building a gingerbread house, or measure force and motion on the basketball court? Highly qualified science and mathematics teachers bring these types of lessons to life for their students. One of these remarkable teachers, Susan Cottingham, a Science teacher at Grovetown Middle School, is being rewarded for her success in using innovative methods and strategies in her classroom. Cottingham has been named a state finalist for the 2005 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST), the nation's highest honor for K-12 teaching in these fields.

Established by Congress in 1983, and administered for the White House by the National Science Foundation, the Presidential Awards allow for each state to select up to three mathematics and three science teachers as state finalists. From this field of state finalists, a maximum of 108 Presidential Awardees are selected representing the 50 states and four U.S. jurisdictions. Recipients of the 2005 Presidential Awards will be announced during a week of celebration events in March 2006 in Washington, DC.

When Cottingham was told she was a state finalist, she said, "I was very surprised and pleased to find out that I was a finalist. It is hard to describe how uplifting it is to know that someone outside your sphere of influence has appreciated your work and sees you as good at your job."

Cottingham is one of the 253 state finalists for the prestigious Presidential Award. Her teaching style is key to her success in the classroom. "Knowing my subject matter is the first step in engaging students. Frequent labs and demonstratinons add to their experiences and hold their interests. Most of my instruction is product-oriented. Students are given a scenario to solve and create a real-world product," said Cottingham. "I teach to all of the mutiple intelligences and different learning styles. I am constantly looking for ways for every student to excel and use their special talents."

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“Presidential Awardees represent exceptional professional models of what we are looking for in science and mathematics teachers. They are highly qualified in their fields, deeply knowledgeable about their subjects, and equipped with the methods and strategies that improve teaching and learning in science and mathematics,” said Celeste Pea, Ph.D., Program Director of Elementary, Secondary, and Informal Education programs at the National Science Foundation. “They strive to provide opportunities for their students to reach their potential in their respective schools and communities. Through this recognition, we hope to motivate similar creativity in other teachers, and to attract new recruits to the mathematics and science teaching profession.”

“When my three brothers and I started school, our parents instilled in us the value of school, learning, and most of all the profession of teaching. When I made the decision to become a teacher, my father, a superintendent, told me, ‘The life of a teacher is hard. You have to be prepared to be mother, father, confidant, disciplinarian, confessor, and anything else that you can think of before you can even begin teaching. All of this work is done for very little pay or recognition.’ To attempt this task may be daunting to some, but to me it was a welcome challenge,” said Cottingham when asked about why she became a teacher.

According to Cottingham, a key to children learning and understanding science is to develop projects that apply science rather than just following a textbook. “Students need to ‘do’ science, not read about it. They need to know how science works and then do it themselves,” she explained. “The only other aspect that I really wish to impart to my students is the use of science. Some of my students don’t see how science applies to their lives outside school. I make a point, as do the other science teachers, of showing how science can be used in life to do such things as compare soaps or medicines to see which is the best value. Science is everywhere.”

The goal of the Presidential Awards is to identify and recognize highly qualified teachers. As part of the recognition process, Awardees will take part in a weeklong series of networking and professional development activities in Washington, DC. In addition, each Awardee will also receive \$10,000 from the National Science Foundation. For more information about PAEMST, see forms and instructions available at: www.paemst.org.