

## MISSOURI EDUCATION NEWS

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## **Education News**

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## **Former Bloomington, Mo., Teacher Deborah Mayer to Receive 2006 NCSS Defense of Academic Freedom Award in Washington**

Deborah Mayer, a former Bloomington, Mo., elementary school teacher now residing in Portland, Ore., will receive the 2006 National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Defense of Academic Freedom Award at the 86th Annual NCSS conference at the Renaissance Washington Hotel in Washington, D.C. Mayer will be honored with an award of \$1,500, and public recognition during the conference, which is the largest gathering of social studies educators in the nation.

The NCSS Defense of Academic Freedom Award recognizes and honors those who have distinguished themselves in defending the principles of academic freedom in specific controversies, in fostering academic freedom through advocacy, and in defending or advocating the freedom to teach and learn. While preference is given to social studies educators, persons in other fields are also considered. Nominee membership in NCSS is not required.

Mayer, was selected for the award because she has shown enormous courage and integrity in fighting for the right of teachers to discuss various opinions in relation to current events. She lost her home and career because she dared to mention peace as an alternative to war in response to a question by one of her students. She has been harassed and her character and integrity attacked relentlessly by those who wanted only their political view to be discussed in class.

"The attacks on Ms. Mayer put at risk every teacher's ability to discuss ideas or events that are controversial to even one student or parent," stated Jeri Hammond, a social studies teacher at Boone Middle School in Haines City, Fla., in her letter nominating Mayer for the award. Hammond further stated, "We cannot educate if we cannot allow students to discuss issues freely and openly under the guidance of an open-minded teacher who presents a variety of viewpoints for consideration. In particular, the attempt to censor political ideas and discussion puts at risk the very foundation of our system of government."

In 2002, Mayer was hired as a teacher at Clear Creek Elementary School in Bloomington, Mo. She taught in an alternative learning setting for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. In January 2003, Mayer was teaching from an approved curriculum resource, Time for Kids, which she used on a weekly basis with her class. One of the articles in that issue reported on the peace marchers in Washington, D.C.,

protesting going to war in Iraq. When asked by a student if she would ever participate in a peace march, she explained that peace marches were happening all over the county, including in Bloomington. She noted that as she drove past the protesters, she would honk her horn for peace, as requested by some of the signs held by protesters, because she believed that peaceful solutions should be sought before going to war. She then related this to the mediators that the school used on the playground to help children solve problems instead of fighting.

A student reported to her parents that Mayer was against the war in Iraq. The parent requested a conference with the principal and Mayer to discuss the curriculum. As a result the principal issued a directive stating, "We absolutely do not, as a school, promote any particular view on foreign policy related to the situation in Iraq." In addition, the school decided to cancel a long-standing tradition of "Peace Month" at the school. This was a month-long series of activities beginning on Martin Luther King Day that promoted the peaceful solution to problems through mediation.

In early February the parent again complained to the principal that Mayer "was lecturing the class to protest the war." Although there had been no further in-class evaluations of Mayer, and no other students or parents had complained, a formal letter of concern signed by the principal and assistant principal was given to Mayer. At the end of the school year she was told that her contract would not be renewed.

Mayer accepted a teaching position in another school and was terminated when the complaints against her came to light. She has not been able to get a teaching job since.

In October 2004, Mayer's attorney filed a suit against Monroe County Community School Corporation for violation of her First Amendment right of free speech. In March 2006, Judge Sarah Evans Barker declared that teachers have no right of free speech in class. This ruling dismissed Mayer's case and denied her right to a jury trial. On April 7, Mayer filed an appeal in the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals.

"To think that my making an unassuming comment about peace could lead to the definitive ruling that establishes that teachers have no right of free speech in class is almost more than I can bear. The thought weighs so heavily on my mind and in my heart that I can hardly sleep. I can't let this ruling stand without a fight," said Mayer.

## **Annual Report Charts Missouri's Participation in School Breakfast Program**

During the 2005-2006 school year, 159,467 low-income Missouri students participated in the School Breakfast Program, according to the *School Breakfast Scorecard 2006*. The Scorecard is issued annually by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) to measure participation in the School Breakfast Program.

For every 100 low-income children that participated in the National School Lunch Program, 49.1 also received free and reduced-price breakfasts. If Missouri schools increased school breakfast participation by serving 60 out of 100 low-income children eating lunch, they would help 35,214 more children and gain an additional \$7,314,787 in federal funding.

In Missouri, 86.8 percent of schools that offer school lunch also offer school breakfast, ranking Missouri 28 out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The School Breakfast Program began as pilot programs in 1966 as a way to make sure children were able to start the school day ready to learn. Numerous studies have found that breakfast in the morning improves children's school achievement and health.

"Reaching a lot more children with breakfast in schools is probably the cheapest and fastest way to improve children's learning and health, improve attendance and, of course, reduce hunger," said Jim Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). "It's essential that more schools serve breakfast, adopt steps like breakfast in the classroom and reach out to more children."

Nationally, the program has grown to include 7.7 million low-income children. To get even more children and schools participating, FRAC recommends that all schools participate in the school breakfast program, even offering universal breakfast, which provides breakfast at no charge to all students who want it. Schools can encourage higher participation among children by providing breakfast in the classroom, "grab and go" breakfast or offering breakfast after first period. These successful strategies have been used by states to boost participation in the program.

The full report, *School Breakfast Scorecard 2006*, is available at [http://www.frac.org/pdf/2006\\_SBP.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/2006_SBP.pdf)

## **New Teacher of the Year and Finalists**

**Darryl Johnson**, Missouri's Teacher of the Year is worried that schools and communities are not doing enough to recruit top-flight candidates into the teaching profession. He will begin emphasizing that message as the state's representative of more than 66,000 classroom teachers in public schools.

**Mr. Johnson** is a communication arts teacher at Smithville High School. Darryl Johnson works hard in the classroom to excite and motivate his students. He believes that if he does his best at teaching, his students will do their best at learning. This mutual expectation permeates his classroom and is at the heart of his teaching philosophy.

He is revered in Smithville as a high-energy teacher who uses enthusiasm and humor to engage his students and help them achieve. Most importantly, he strives to earn their respect.

The feeling is mutual.

Student McKynlee Westman described Mr. Johnson as "something special." "Every student left his room at the end of the year with a better knowledge of respect, creativity and what they could achieve," she said in a letter of recommendation for the award.

A nine-member selection committee appointed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education interviewed six state-level finalists Aug. 31 to select the new Teacher of the Year. Mr. Johnson automatically becomes Missouri's candidate for the 2007 National Teacher of the Year award.

Mr. Johnson is beginning his 15th year in the profession. He has been in his current position at Smithville High School since 1995 and is presently chair of the English department. His effectiveness as a teacher is based upon establishing and maintaining mutual expectations, using humor to spark and retain interest, and developing creative assessments.

"The truth about achievement really comes down to teachers and students having *mutually* high expectations of one another," he said in the written nomination form for the award. "Students respect teachers who hold strong convictions but are also empathetic; ones who use humor often without being insensitive or inappropriate; ones who are prepared but flexible. Students want someone who knows their name, acknowledges their presence and establishes a safe environment for them.

"Simply put, good teaching involves humor because it's effective in establishing and maintaining rapport and improving retention. Humor is one of the few things that connect teachers and students. Unpredictable zingers from both teachers and students add liveliness and color to discussion."

### **"An Ambassador for Both Teaching and Learning"**

Mr. Johnson serves on the professional development committee for his district and school. He also serves on the Northwest Missouri State University Advisory Council in Secondary English Methods. His writings have been published in regional and national publications, including the "English Journal," a national publication for high school English teachers. Six of his lessons have been featured as best practices by Missouri SuccessLink (<http://www.successlink.org/>), three of which won a \$100 stipend. He has been a keynote speaker for various education groups and for three commencement ceremonies.

Before joining the Smithville School District in 1995, he taught at Plattsburg High School in the Clinton County R-III School District (1993-95) and at Northeast Nodaway County R-V High School, Ravenwood (1992-93). He also was an adjunct instructor at Maple Woods Community College from 2002-04.

Mr. Johnson holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in English from Northwest Missouri State University. He earned national certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in 2002.

At Smithville High School, he has been named Teacher of the Year eight years in a row (1998-2006). Superintendent Rob Leachman described Mr. Johnson as a "phenomenal" teacher. "His standards are very high, but he conversely assumes a high level of personal responsibility for assisting his students to meet those high standards. In the Smithville School District, he is a shining star whose impact upon the literally hundreds of students he has taught over the years has

been profound."

The finalists were:

**Carol Dunn**, science teacher, Summit Lakes Middle School, Lee's Summit School District

**Kevin Hampton**, video production teacher, McCluer North High School, Ferguson-Florissant School District

**Robert Swingler**, chorus teacher, Hazelwood East High School, Hazelwood School District

**Linda Wiederholt**, math teacher, Plaza Middle School, Park Hill School District, Kansas City

**Lario Yerino**, chemistry and physics teacher, Oak Park High School, North Kansas City School District

State Board of Education Vice President Russell V. Thompson and Deputy Commissioner of Education Bert Schulte will conduct the award presentation.

### **Two St. Louis Educators Win \$25,000 Milken Award**

Two St. Louis area elementary teachers were surprised with big news in October. During emotional assemblies at their schools, each learned she is a winner of a \$25,000 Milken National Educator Award

(<http://dese.mo.gov/commissioner/milken/index.htm>).

The teachers are:

**Luella Atkins**, reading coach for grades K-6, Airport Elementary School, Ferguson-Florissant School District

**Susan Carter**, first-grade teacher, Jackson Park Elementary School, University City School District

The awards were presented by Milken Family Foundation Chairman and Co-

Founder Lowell Milken and Deputy Commissioner Bert Schulte. The Milken Educator Award is given to classroom teachers, principals and other public school professionals who are providing exemplary leadership in their schools and communities and working to promote excellence in public education.

### **Ferguson-Florissant Teacher**

Ms. Atkins has taught in the Ferguson-Florissant School District since 1996. As reading coach for the school's Reading First program, she trains teachers in writing and language arts skills and strategies, and assists in assessing students. She was a Missouri STARR (Select Teachers As Regional Resources) Teacher for 2002-04.

"Ms. Atkins' focus is totally centered on meeting students' needs. She utilizes various research-based instructional methodologies to incorporate diverse activities and materials to engage and interest students. She works to develop a strong rapport with parents and other educational providers working with students," Principal Rosetta Patton said.

### **University City Teacher**

Ms. Carter has taught first grade at Jackson Park Elementary School since 2001. She is chair of the school's professional development committee. She also is a National Board Certified teacher and serves as a candidate facilitator for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

"Ms. Carter provides students with a great balance of academic rigor and socially conscious instruction. In addition to learning the skills necessary for success in content areas, she makes it a point to give students experiences, which help them to grow into caring members of their community," Principal Carlos Diaz-Granados said.

## **Elsberry Middle School Instructor Honored as Preserve America's History Teacher of the Year**

Claire Hasemeier, a social studies teacher at Ida Cannon Middle School, Elsberry R-II School District (Lincoln County), was recently honored as Missouri's Preserve America History Teacher of the Year for 2006.

Mrs. Hasemeier was formally recognized on September 13 during a school

assembly. She received a plaque, \$1,000 and historical materials for the school library. Sheila Onuska, assistant director of the International Education Consortium, based at the St. Louis Regional Professional Development Center, presented the awards.

Mrs. Hasemeier has taught in the Elsberry School District for 10 years. She is involved in many professional organizations including the National Council for History Education, the National Council for the Social Studies and the Missouri Council for the Social Studies. She has supervised the alignment of her school district's social studies curriculum, using Missouri's Show-Me Standards.

Preserve America is a White House initiative in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and in partnership with several federal agencies. The award is administered by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, in cooperation with the National Council for History Education, the Organization of American Historians and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

### **Kennett School Nurse Earns National Honor**

Deborah S. Cook, health services coordinator for the Kennett School District, has received the 2006 Outstanding School Nurse Award from the American School Health Association. She was honored earlier this month during ASHA's national conference in St. Louis.

Twelve years ago, Ms. Cook was the only school nurse in the 2,000-student Kennett School District. She wrote a competitive grant, based on the coordinated school health model, which allowed the district to greatly expand health education activities and services. She also has served the district as an instructor for health occupations and EMT classes.

She completed her associate of science in nursing at Arkansas State University and is currently working to complete her bachelor of science in nursing degree at Southeast Missouri State University.

Ms. Cook attributes the success of Kennett's health services program to her active school health advisory committee and strong community involvement.

Ms. Cook advises the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services on issues relating to health and health services in rural schools. She is past president of the Missouri Association of School Nurses and currently serves as vice-chair of the Missouri Coordinated School Health Coalition. Gov. Matt Blunt recently appointed her to a new, statewide Suicide Prevention Task Force.

## **High Schools Are Developing Required Classes in Personal Finance**

Missouri public high schools are gearing up to teach all students an essential life skill: how to manage their money.

A half-unit course in personal finance is one of the new requirements approved last year by the State Board of Education when it raised the minimum number of credits needed to graduate from a public high school from 22 to 24 units. The new policy applies to this year's freshman class – students who will graduate in 2010.

Courses in finance, consumer resource management or investments are not new to Missouri high schools. They have long been offered as electives in most school districts. The new requirement, however, applies to all students and should boost the financial savvy of future graduates.

"Many high school students are opening checking accounts, getting jobs, buying cars, filing tax returns and getting offers for credit cards," said Nancy Headrick, assistant commissioner for career education in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

"In order for individuals to prepare for work and family life in today's society, they need a variety of skills for making informed decisions, managing resources and solving practical problems," she said.

One of many high school educators who encouraged the adoption of personal finance as a graduation requirement is Joy Behrens, family and consumer sciences department chair at North Kansas City High School, in the North Kansas City School District. She is confident the course will help students gain the knowledge they need to manage their finances when they get out on their

own.

"A lot of kids are not prepared to manage their income," Behrens said, noting many of today's children grow up naively thinking cash comes from an ATM and that goods and services can be purchased with plastic cards. With better knowledge of how to manage their personal finances, the next generation of students will be able to contribute more to a strong economy, she believes. To help meet the state's new course requirement, a recommended set of knowledge and skills statements has been developed by an advisory group of educators, business leaders and DESE staff.

The Missouri Center for Career Education, located at the University of Central Missouri, also led the development of a model, problem-based curriculum for high schools to use in teaching personal finance. "The curriculum can provide students with relevant and realistic types of problem-based learning that will help them apply personal finance to their everyday lives," Dr. Headrick said. The course has been organized into four content areas: income and taxes, money management, spending and credit, and saving and investing.

Personal finance is already being offered in a number of public high schools across Missouri. Nearly 80 teachers of business, social studies, and family and consumer sciences attended a week-long workshop, sponsored by DESE this summer, to review the competencies and model curriculum. More workshops for teachers will be offered in coming months.

In the past, the North Kansas City School District has offered two courses dealing with personal finance in the business education and the family and consumer sciences departments. The district is now planning to offer a single course that will be required for all high school students.

Ben Loeb, a business education instructor at Rock Bridge High School, in the Columbia School District, attended the summer teachers' workshop and has already adapted his financial management course to satisfy the personal finance requirement.

"I think the State Board made a very wise decision to include this course as a graduation requirement," Loeb said.

He and an instructor at Columbia's Hickman High School spent time over the summer reviewing the recommended competencies and developing lesson

plans. He applauded the curriculum development committee but believes the range of topics may be too broad to cover adequately in one semester. "Given time, I am convinced more teachers will develop and share instructional resources in support of this course," Loeb said.

Loeb reports enrollment in personal finance is up slightly this year, because more Rock Bridge juniors and seniors are taking the class as an elective. While not required for graduation, many upperclassmen already have jobs and checking accounts and find the course highly relevant and practical. He also attributed the growing interest to student opinion that a course soon to be required must be worth taking now.

Dr. Headrick notes that opportunities for an online course in personal finance, competency testing, and dual credit at the high school and college levels may be available in the future. An online competency test for use in conjunction with personal finance courses will be piloted by some schools in December and May.