



Herb Kohl Educational Foundation, Inc.
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent



******NEWS RELEASE******

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Four Teachers of the Year honored

*Neurohr, Kowalczyk, Siebert, and Gilbert to represent
Wisconsin's PK-12 public school educators for 2008-09 school year*

MADISON – “Quality teachers are at the very heart of quality education,” said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster in announcing the 2008-09 Wisconsin Teachers of the Year.

“Lori Neurohr, Sandra Kowalczyk, Lucas Siebert, and Sharon Gilbert will represent Wisconsin’s PK-12 educators for the next year, and we could not ask for better. Each is passionate about helping their students succeed, and each pursues professional development and community partnership activities that provide opportunities for their students to learn 21st century skills such as global and technology literacies.”

Lori Neurohr teaches second grade at Kohler Elementary School and will serve as the Wisconsin Elementary Teacher of the Year. Sandra Kowalczyk, who teaches sixth- through eighth-grade reading at Patrick Marsh Middle School in Sun Prairie, was named the Wisconsin Middle/Junior High School Teacher of the Year. The Wisconsin High School Teacher of the Year is Lucas Siebert, of Oostburg High School, who teaches technology education to seventh- through 12th-graders. Sharon Gilbert will serve as the Wisconsin Special Services Teacher of the Year. She was nominated as a music teacher at Alexander Middle School in the Nekoosa School District and is currently a music teacher at Humke Elementary School, also in Nekoosa.

The Teachers of the Year received the news during surprise events at their schools this week. They had not been told they were under consideration for the award. As part of the honor, each will receive \$3,000 from U.S. Senator Herb Kohl, through the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation. Burmaster will honor the four Teachers of the Year on Sept. 18 during her State of Education speech and awards ceremony at the State Capitol in Madison.

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During the 2008-09 school year, the Teachers of the Year will represent approximately 63,300 teachers working in Wisconsin. They are chosen for their ability to inspire students' love of learning, instructional innovation and leadership, and commitment to community involvement.

A panel of educators, parents, and community leaders selected the four Teachers of the Year from a pool of 86 Kohl Teacher Fellows who were named in spring 2008. Later this fall, the same committee will select one Teacher of the Year who will represent Wisconsin in the National Teacher of the Year program and will receive an additional \$6,000 award from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

Kohl Teacher Fellowships are presented each year to Wisconsin educators to recognize excellence and innovation. Those who are chosen show superior ability to inspire a love of learning in their students and the ability to motivate others, as well as leadership and service within and outside the classroom. Each Kohl Teacher Fellow receives a \$1,000 award, and the fellow's school receives a \$1,000 grant. Nominations for Kohl Teacher Fellowship Awards are due by Oct. 3 and can be made from the foundation website at <http://www.kohleducation.org/>.

In addition to the Kohl Teacher Fellowship Program, each year, the Kohl Foundation awards \$1,000 Excellence Scholarships to 100 graduating seniors who have demonstrated academic potential, outstanding leadership, citizenship, community service, integrity, and other special talents. Another 85 students receive \$1,000 Initiative Scholarships, presented to students who have demonstrated a high level of motivation to achieve, have shown strong promise for success in college and beyond, and have overcome significant personal obstacles or adversity.

Elementary Teacher of the Year

Neurohr has researched and implemented a number of innovations to help students in her class and shares that knowledge with her colleagues through presentations, committees, collaborative projects, and informal conversations. Neurohr works in the summer and after school tutoring and supporting students, volunteering, and improving her classroom. She partners readily with parents and is praised for the way she "embraces, with grace and a strong management acumen," classes of about two dozen diverse learners, including gifted and talented youth and children with special needs. Colleagues and parents praise her work ethic, her compassion for every student, her fun-loving approach, her leadership and collaborative spirit, and her drive to continually improve her teaching. One of Neurohr's second-graders wrote, "I jump out of bed each morning and can't wait to get to school. We have the best teacher in the world." Neurohr holds degrees from Lakeland College in Sheboygan and Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee.

Middle/Junior High School Teacher of the Year

Kowalczyk holds her reading intervention students to high standards, takes a leadership role in many special projects, and integrates international experiences into the curriculum. Parents, colleagues, and

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assessment results testify that she has helped struggling readers improve their skills. Kowalczyk has won awards and grants for projects that increase academic achievement and global literacy, such as “Breakfast with Books,” which targeted reading achievement of at-risk students and students of color by involving them in literature activities while enjoying nutritious breakfasts. “Wear in the World” combined art, reading, writing, and geography as students learned how clothing in different cultures “communicates messages” in its own way. Kowalczyk also facilitated the exchange of “culture bags” between students from Wisconsin and students from Uzbekistan. Kowalczyk holds degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

High School Teacher of the Year

Siebert helps students hone 21st century skills such as problem-solving and creativity, using real-world engineering and design challenges and drawing on partnerships with business and community leaders. Siebert’s students organize themselves into a business-like structure based on their individual interests, then set to work entering statewide competitions such as Extreme Redesign, Electrathon, and Sustainable Residential Design. Siebert brings his own passion for learning to his classes, including his fervor for “green” engineering: students implement sustainability principles in their work. Siebert has logged numerous hours forging partnerships with businesses and individuals in the community, and secured equipment donations for his school’s technology programs worth more than \$14,000. Siebert holds a degree in technology education from the University of Wisconsin-Stout at Menomonie.

Special Services Teacher of the Year

Gilbert’s passion for using music to reach students on many levels and her dedication to fostering success for every learner are among the many assets noted by her colleagues. “We need to teach the whole student,” she says, “and we cannot do that without teaching the arts.” Gilbert also uses music to teach global literacy, tutors students who are struggling, and has co-chaired a reinvigoration of the Wisconsin Music Education Association’s Music Listening Project. Music listening is now a required subject at Alexander Middle School. Colleagues and parents praise Gilbert’s dedication and passion. Among her achievements is the creation of a guitar class for her students. She knew adolescents would be interested in guitar instruction, but did not know how to play herself, nor did her school own enough instruments. Gilbert raised funds for 20 guitars and enrolled in lessons to learn the instrument. The class began less than a year later and continues to be popular. Gilbert holds two music education degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

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NOTES: More information about each Teacher of the Year can be found in individualized news releases available on-line from the DPI news release page at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/prmenu.html>. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2008_128.pdf.