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Daniel Johnson named Milken National Educator

Greendale teacher is among up to 80 K-12 educators across the country receiving awards

MADISON – Daniel Johnson, police officer turned elementary school teacher and a 2008 Milken National Educator Award recipient, has earned admiration and praise from parents, teachers, and administrators for his child-centered focus to education.

Johnson, a third-grade teacher at College Park Elementary School, takes a multi-level approach to teaching. Students learn through reading and writing, creative thinking, dialogue, small-group work, online research, and books. He has students work on projects integrated with media and the arts as well as other hands-on tasks. Recent students demonstrated their knowledge by writing an endangered animal report, creating their own comics, and visiting a museum with digital cameras, used to create slide shows comparing and contrasting what they learned in their Native American unit.

“Everything with Daniel is child-centered,” wrote a colleague. He approached a child’s parents for permission to work before school to help the student overcome a significant reading problem. The child moved from minimal proficiency to the proficient level on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination as a result of Johnson’s intervention. His ability to motivate young people is cited by colleagues as inspiring students to request learning tasks they had avoided in the past. His guided reading time and other instructional techniques result in high levels of student achievement.

Johnson serves as a role model for his students, particularly to boys and struggling students. He is described as playing a key role in how the district engages students in their learning. Johnson’s “incredible sense of humor” helps him create an environment in which students have fun while learning. “He is accepting and patient,” wrote a parent. “He is not threatened by letting students explore and be themselves. When I’ve helped in the classroom, the kids are totally excited.”

In addition to his classroom work, Johnson is known within the Greendale School District as a technology innovator. He trains other teachers on the use of the ActivBoard as well as digital cameras and video editing software. He serves on the district technology and school safety committees. Johnson also served on the panel that helped select a new principal.

Johnson earned a bachelor of science degree in criminal justice from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and worked 12 years with the Milwaukee Police Department. He earned his state teacher certification in elementary education and broadfield social studies through Carroll College in Waukesha. Johnson student taught at Fritsche Middle School in Milwaukee and Saratoga Elementary School in Waukesha. Prior to joining the College Park Elementary School staff, he taught fifth-grade social studies and fifth- through eighth-grade reading at Glen Hills Middle School in Glendale.

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