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REGIONAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION
KANE COUNTY

Patricia Dal Santo, Regional Superintendent

Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy teacher named 2024 Educator of the Year by Kane County Regional Office of Education

SAINT CHARLES, Ill. – Nearly 1,000 guests gathered at the Q Center in St. Charles to celebrate the exceptional contributions of educational professionals across Kane County at the 48th Educator of the Year Banquet on Friday. The annual event, hosted by the Kane County Regional Office of Education (ROE) was a showcase of the dedication and passion of educators in all types of roles as well as the impact they make on students and their communities.

Amidst a record-setting pool of 57 nominees, Cynthia Martinez of Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy was named the 2024 Educator of the Year. Ms. Martinez, a middle school teacher in East Aurora District 131, accepted the award among friends, family, and colleagues as she spoke about her profound dedication to her students and community,

“I’m able to teach in the community I was born and raised in. I grew up in Aurora and see myself in my (students),” Martinez told the ROE in an interview for the event. “I feel invested in being able to teach here. I want to engage them in ideas like problem-solving and how they see the world so they can understand not only their civic duties and responsibilities, but also their civic rights. How can they use education to empower their community and make a plan of action for change, whatever they feel that change may be?”

Colleagues and loved ones sent messages of appreciation and encouragement for the recipient throughout the weekend. Among those was State Rep. Barbara Hernandez (D-IL), who shared that she learned under Martinez as a seventh grade student years ago.

The evening was not only a tribute to outstanding educational staff, but also a celebration of the contributions made by 194 retiring educators from the nine school districts in Kane County. Among those recognized were outgoing superintendents Dr. Jeff Craig of West Aurora District 129 and Dr. Susan Harkin of District 300, who have combined for over 60 years of service in education.

Highlighting the collaborative spirit of students, staff, and community, the East Aurora High School Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps presented the colors for the evening, while the Dundee Middle School Cardinal Jazz Band provided entertainment throughout the night.

“This was a showcase of the passion and accomplishments of our educators, and it was remarkable to see the crowd that gathered to commemorate these individuals,” said Patricia Dal Santo, Regional

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Superintendent for Kane County. “We had the opportunity to acknowledge those who are just beginning their careers, those who are stepping away after decades of dedication, those who are no longer with us, and those who simply try to make each day special for students, families, and colleagues.”

Among the attendees were Illinois State Representative Jeff Keicher (R-IL), Dr. David Samm, President of Elgin Community College, members of the Kane County Governmental staff, Kane County Board, and Kane County ROE Regional Board of Trustees.

“There is such anticipation for this event each year because it reminds us of what is worth advocating for in education,” said Dal Santo. “The people make the difference, and these nominees have influenced the lives of thousands of students. That is worth celebrating, above all. We are grateful to be able to acknowledge these leaders that continue to work towards preparing students to be successful in life.”

Nominations were reviewed by a group of student teachers, retired teachers, university representatives, business representatives, national board certified teachers, and Kane County ROE staff members. Other winners from the event include:

Regional Superintendent Award

Dr. Jeff Craig (West Aurora 129)

Educational Service Personnel

Jamie Snyder, Davis Primary School (St. Charles 303)

Student Support Personnel

Michelle Vargas-Herbst, Geneva High School (Geneva 304)

Early Career Educator

Taylor Cyr, St. Charles East High School (St. Charles 303)
Carson Porter, Central Middle School (Central 301)

Elementary/Early Childhood Teacher

Peggy Hernandez, U-46 Planetarium (District U-46)

Middle School Teacher

Bradley Staker, Kaneland Harter Middle School (Kaneland 302)

High School Teacher

Michael Jakubowski, Hampshire High School (District 300)

School Administrator

Annette McMahon, Oak Park Elementary (East Aurora 131)

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About Kane County Regional Office of Education

Kane County Regional Office of Education serves the residents of Kane County, IL. and assists nine school districts (U-46, Batavia 101, West Aurora 129, East Aurora 131, District 300, Central 301, Kaneland 302, St. Charles 303, and Geneva 304). Located at 28 N. First St., Geneva, IL, Kane ROE serves over 9,831 educators and covers 524 square miles. Kane ROE was recognized, in 2023, by the National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC) with two Blue Pencil & Gold Screen Awards. The awards recognized excellence in government communication & were presented for outstanding work in the Annual Report & Video Education categories.