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Contact: Tom McCarthy, DPI Communications Director, (608) 266-3559

Kim Marggraf, Herb Kohl Educational Foundation Inc., (920) 457-1727 (office) (920) 946-3640 (cell)

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Sarahi Monterrey named a 2019 High School Teacher of the Year

Waukesha North educator to receive \$3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON – In a surprise ceremony at her school today, Sarahi Monterrey, an English Learner teacher at Waukesha North High School, was named a Wisconsin 2019 High School Teacher of the Year.

State Superintendent Tony Evers made the announcement during an all-school assembly. As part of the Teacher of the Year honor, Monterrey will receive \$3,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

“Our teachers wear many hats, yet their dedication to children is constant,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “From the classroom to the conference room to the community, they focus on our kids and their education. It is an honor to recognize educators who do so much for Wisconsin’s students and our public schools.”

Herb Kohl, philanthropist, businessman, and co-sponsor of the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program through his educational foundation, said he supports the program because “I want to help teachers pursue their unrealized goals for their classroom, their school, or their professional development.”

“Ever since I was a little girl, I always knew I wanted to be a teacher,” said Monterrey in her application materials. As a child immigrant from El Salvador, she recognizes the pivotal role teachers play in students’ lives. “The power in making students feel welcome and safe cannot be underestimated,” she said. Monterrey’s work on inclusion includes the visible, “Dreamers Welcome” and “This School Welcomes You” posters. Not as visible, but just as important, are her extra efforts to ensure a curriculum that is representative of various backgrounds so students feel inspired; her work to improve family communication so parents understand they are part of their student’s success; and her outreach to ensure that English learner (EL) students have access to extracurricular activities and support to be ready for college.

When Monterrey arrived at Waukesha North, the school had a single bilingual study skills class for newcomer students. The next year, the school began offering English as a Second Language and redesigned the study skills curriculum to focus more on enrichment. Through the examination of student achievement

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data, Monterrey and her colleagues identified classes where EL students were not successful. Through the co-teaching model she introduced, content and specialty teachers work together to make classes comprehensible to all students. The school now offers three levels of English as a Second Language and staff co-teach English 9, algebra I and II, geometry, Spanish IV, and chemistry. Additionally, more EL students take Advanced Placement coursework, helping them gain college readiness skills.

Her sessions on immigration policies and the impact those policies have on students helped other teachers increase their awareness of the topic. She has offered professional development sessions to staff throughout her career, focusing on serving EL students, equity, and culturally responsive practices. Waukesha North is also growing its Dual Language Programs. The school was one of the first in the state to offer Wisconsin Seal of Biliteracy awards to recognize students who have demonstrated advanced achievement in bilingualism, biliteracy (in two or more languages), and sociocultural competence.

Girl Talk, a club she created with a mission to inspire and empower students, helps participants be decision makers, hone problem-solving skills, and volunteer in the community. A former student commended her teacher for going “well beyond what a teacher’s job is. She believed in me when I did not believe in myself.” The student said Monterrey helped her get involved in the community, taught her the importance of resiliency, guided her in her development as a scholar, helped her look for scholarships, and believes her teacher’s guidance is the reason she is in college.

Monterrey volunteers at the Waukesha Food Pantry, the Hope Center, and the Hunger Task Force in Milwaukee. She is also involved in the Waukesha Hispanic Collaborative Network, which works to improve members’ access to services. Some of those services have included a health fair and a financial planning workshop.

Prior to working at Waukesha North, Monterrey worked at Waukesha South and Whitewater high schools. She started her career as a Spanish and English learner teacher for grades seven through 12 at Whitewater middle and high schools. She holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

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