



2019 Private School Teacher of the Year Announced

Art teacher Catherine Burnett of Pius XI Catholic High School wins award

Catherine Burnett is the Art Department Chair for Pius XI Catholic High School in Milwaukee, and named the 2019 Private School Teacher of the Year on May 10.

She has been on staff at Pius XI for 30 years, teaching a variety of art classes. Burnett started teaching at Pius XI in 1989.

Burnett was chosen from among 6,000 private school teachers in Wisconsin for this prestigious award funded by the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation and coordinated by the Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools (WCRIS).

It comes just after Burnett was also named as one of the 14 Private School Herb Kohl Foundation Teacher Fellowship award winners. She received \$6,000 award for herself, and another \$6,000 for her school and as Teacher of the Year, she will receive an additional \$3,000 unrestricted award.

“Catherine is a teacher who is transforming education in Wisconsin. She is a prime example of an educator that empowers Wisconsin’s private school students,” said Sharon Schmeling, Executive Director of WCRIS.

The Council coordinated the Teacher of the Year Program with the Kohl Foundation. WCRIS is a non-profit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) membership association representing more than 100,000 K-12 students in 600 Catholic, Lutheran, Christian, Seventh Day Adventist, and independent schools across Wisconsin.

Burnett was chosen because of her ability to identify the creative potential in every student, grounding them in self-directed, meaningful work that leads to academic and lifelong success.

“Students have to feel that you care, that you are invested in their success and believe in them. The byproduct is that they will feel they belong and are safe, safe to speak up, question and be themselves. Fun, play, experimentation, discovery are important elements in art making, and essential to building a place where they want to be and work,” she said in her application.

“I think trusting students, giving them freedom/agency over their time, working space and the content of their work empowers them, it validates their questions and allows for open discussion, collaboration and growth,” she said.

Burnett’s hard work has results. The art program is regarded as among the top high school art programs in the nation. The department has been recognized by the White House six times since 1995. Her students have been recognized as National Presidential Scholars and National Young Arts Foundation Finalists.

Recently two Pius students who had suffered significant hardships earned the title of Presidential Scholars, and are now on full scholarships to prestigious art colleges.

In addition to empowering her students, Burnett works to host an annual AP Fall Portfolio Event that connects her AP students to the nation's best art colleges and universities who come to interview the students.

Parents applaud Burnett's work. One parent noted that "This extraordinary art program Cathy has created is more than an art program for already gifted students. It's a program for students, regardless of talent, that serves as the supportive container to bravely make their first mark on their own hearts - in turn allowing each to make and leave a powerful mark on the world."

Beyond serving Pius as a teacher, Burnett has volunteered at the Haggerty Art Museum at Marquette University, Wauwatosa Children's Hospital, the Italian Community Center and Discovery World's Kohl Design It Lab.

For more information, contact Daniel Henderson, Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools Communications and Outreach Coordinator, at dhenderson@wcris.org or (608) 287-1224.

###