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Hudson County Teacher Wins Christa McAuliffe Fellowship

Deirdre Mingey, a fifth grade teacher at Mustard Seed School, Hoboken, Hudson County, is New Jersey's recipient of the Christa McAuliffe Fellowship for 2000-01. Commissioner of Education David Hespe introduced the honored teacher at today's regular meeting of the New Jersey Board of Education.

"Deirdre Mingey has demonstrated her commitment to meeting the social and emotional needs of her students. She is always looking for new ways to make sure every child has a chance to learn," Commissioner Hespe said.

The fellowship will enable Mingey to refine her innovative and successful program, entitled Shared Space, in the Mustard Seed School. Through this program, students are able to use a room that consists of different stations incorporating a variety of learning media.

Shared Space provides five strategies for learning: student choice, thematic units, multiple intelligences and learning styles, cross-age groupings, and cooperative learning. In the Shared Space, students can work at one of seven possible centers: paint, sand/water table, drama, weaving, project table, woodworking and sculpture. The activities at the centers are directed by classroom teachers and Shared Space staff and directly relate to classroom studies.

In the coming school year, Mingey will produce a practical manual describing how to implement Shared Space in schools throughout the state. She will research and document the uses and outcomes of the Shared Space learning process, involve teachers within her school, and introduce technology for student research, graphics and design by adding a computer and other video capabilities.

Mingey has taught for the last 12 years. Shanna Pargellis, the co-head of the Mustard Seed School, said, "Ms. Mingey has a good understanding of the benefits and difficulties of starting up a shared space program...She has an awareness of details and an understanding of the big picture in learning. Ms. Mingey is the right person to develop this Shared Space Project and share this unique program with other schools."

The Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program is a federal program that rewards teaching excellence in a variety of areas, including innovative programs, projects involving the business community, sharing of technology and staff development. The Department of Education administers the program in New Jersey.