



NJDOE News

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For Release: October 3, 2007

Norwood Social Studies Teacher is 2007 NJ Teacher of the Year

John Kline is equally comfortable sporting Civil War era sideburns or sitting behind the keyboard of a 21st century laptop. He believes in teachers as undisputed role models in the lives of children.

Kline works closely with his teaching colleagues in other subject areas to coordinate lessons for his seventh and eighth grade students. He is an enthusiastic presence in his classroom, always looking for an effective approach—a better way—to reach his students.

He leads by example, whether in the classroom, on the basketball court in a girls' recreation league, or in his community. John Kline's vision of teaching and its impact on young people is ongoing, both for him and for his students, who frequently visit him or stay in touch long after they graduate.

Kline, a social studies teacher at the Norwood Public School in Norwood, Bergen County, today was introduced to the State Board of Education as New Jersey's Teacher of the Year for 2007.

"John Kline has clearly dedicated his career to make learning an exciting, essential and important experience for all of his students, every day," said Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy. "He is a proud representative of the many teachers who model excellence and professionalism in classrooms throughout New Jersey.

"He is a forward-looking leader of his classroom who approaches his responsibility creatively and incorporates state-of-the art research and high technology to inspire and prepare his students."

After earning a bachelor's degree in history and sociology from Lebanon Valley College and a masters degree in American History from Rutgers University, Kline earned a master of arts for teachers (MAT) degree from Trenton State College in 1995. A year later, he accepted the position of social studies teacher for seventh and eighth grade students at the Norwood Public School. He moved into town, set up his classroom, and has contributed to the good of his school and community ever since.

"A teacher is a public servant and should be mindful of the civic responsibilities that coincide with this position," Kline said. "I believe that it is essential for educators to be actively involved in the community to foster relationships with prominent community leaders, promote community service among their students, and serve as positive role models for the students they serve."

Kline's perspective of the continuous act of teaching and learning throughout life is clear. "Unlike most professions, our clients are never cured, nor is the case concluded, it is perpetual," he said. "Learning and teaching are taking place even in the most chaotic environment."

Sometimes that environment comes equipped with sideburns.

"Earlier this year, I arrived at school in the battle dress uniform as Civil War General Ambrose Burnside, complete with the long sideburns," said Kline, who thoroughly enjoys meshing the art of his profession with up-to-date knowledge of brain research and multiple learning styles of children. "We write and conduct plays and act out historical events, but the real acting in teaching occurs every day. Despite an unappealing portion of the curriculum or uncooperative audience, the show must go on!"

"John Kline is a charismatic and passionate teacher with the highest expectations for all of his students," said Dr. Andrew Rose, Norwood superintendent of schools. "Stop by his classroom and you may see him in an historic costume or excitedly gesturing about the role that waves of different immigrants have played in American history, or about the struggles in the Civil Rights movement."

Kline's commitment to an interdisciplinary approach leads him to work closely with the other teachers in the Norwood Public School. He coordinates cross-curriculum activities with other teachers, thereby infusing social studies with mathematics, art, music, science, Spanish, reading, and English.

Kline calls himself relentless in trying to find the best way to reach his students, and the best way for one is almost never the best way for all. "Sometimes my ideas flop tragically, but persistence pays off," he said. To illustrate, Kline told the story of a very troubled student, who presented a challenge to Kline to the point where, despite his best efforts, he felt convinced he did not succeed. Years

later he met the student, now employed by a local business. “The student rattled off Supreme Court cases, World War II battles, how the stock market works. Because I never quit trying to teach him, he never quit trying to learn, even when it appeared hopeless.

“All of these characteristics support my teaching style based on the practical belief, “Keep trying until something works,” Kline said.

Betty Johnson, principal of Norwood Public School, called Kline “a dynamically creative teacher who makes social studies come alive. He storytells each aspect of social studies content in a motivating way.”

And Judith Shedletsky, guidance counselor at the school, often sees Kline’s former students return to Norwood Public School. “Many previous students have asked to be high school interns in John’s classes and some have gone on to be history majors in colleges. Students state that John’s enthusiasm for his subject and teaching style inspired them.”

In addition to teaching social studies, Kline is also his school’s social studies coordinator. He has served in the dual capacity since his arrival in the district. He is currently vice president of the Norwood Education Association and he chairs the association’s Legislative Committee.

Kline is quite active in the community at large, serving as president of Norwood Recreation Basketball and as a member of the Norwood Recreation Committee. In his church (Church of the Holy Communion, Norwood), he is currently a vestry member and director of the Sunday School. He is also a trustee of the Haven Beach Club.

As New Jersey Teacher of the Year, Kline will participate in a half-year sabbatical from Educational Testing Service, from January to June, 2008. The New Jersey Education Association will pay for the rental of a car for Kline to use as he travels the state to take part in a variety of activities associated with his title.

Kline’s selection automatically enters him into the National Teacher of the Year competition. The Council of Chief State School Officers, sponsor of the national program, will name the nation’s top teacher in April 2008.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Attached is a list of the [2007-08 County Teachers of the Year](#).