



NJDOE News

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Lawrenceville Elementary School Teacher is 2008 NJ Teacher of the Year

Jeanne M. Muzi is ready to meet the challenges facing education in the 21st century. Child-centered learning, individual learning plans, and a focus on students actively engaged in the classroom make her a model teacher at the dawn of a new era in education.

Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy today introduced Muzi, a first-grade elementary school teacher at the Ben Franklin School in Lawrenceville, Mercer County, to the State Board of Education, as New Jersey's Teacher of the Year for 2008.

"Welcome to the 21st century! The days of 'talking at' children are over," Muzi said. "We must no longer look at the 'what' we teach, like it is a shopping list of items to acquire. Our focus must be to teach how to think, how to approach problems and figure out solutions. Our students must be prepared to succeed in jobs that haven't been invented, to unravel mysteries of the modern world and decipher all the problems the future holds for them."

"Jeanne Muzi says she is lucky to be a teacher in the field of education at this exciting time," Commissioner Davy said. "I would say that we are all lucky to have her and the many teachers like her who excel each day in our classrooms to ensure that our students are well prepared for success."

Although she has had a lifelong interest in education, teaching was not Muzi's original career choice. She studied humanities with an emphasis on visual art, literature, poetry, theater and commercial art at Eisenhower College of Rochester Institute of Technology, from which she graduated with a bachelor's degree in humanities / art.

After graduation, she worked as a graphic designer in New York City and later became art director at a corporate communication / graphic design studio. But despite her success, she said something was missing.

"I felt that I was not improving the world or having any hand in making it a better place," Muzi said. "I was unsure at how I could contribute, but I knew I wanted to make a change."

Her future path to teaching crystallized, she said, when her oldest son entered kindergarten at Ben Franklin School. She considered her son's school a special place where every parent was made to feel valued and appreciated. And every professional she encountered there, she said, was an ambassador of teaching.

When her son went on to intermediate school, she entered the graduate level teacher certification program in elementary education at Rider University, which she completed in May 2002. She applied for a position at Ben Franklin, where she has been viewed as a teacher leader since September 2002.

Over the past six years, she has mentored a beginning teacher, served as a cooperating teacher for college students, acted as a faculty representative to the parent-teacher organization and is a member of the district's science vision and action team, gifted and talented task force, and gifted and talented design team. She has also been a trainer for the Math Out of the Box program, enabling her colleagues to enhance their math lessons.

Muzi sees her philosophy of teaching as the four legs of a chair, which by their strength and balance securely support her students. The four "legs" represent: a feeling of safety and security in the classroom; encouragement for students to be actively involved in all aspects of their learning as hands-on problem solvers; creative learning experiences to make education memorable; and encouragement and use of technology in the classroom.

"Jeanne Muzi is clearly a teacher's teacher and a school administrator's dream," said William R. Buss, principal of Ben Franklin Elementary School. "She continually plans and implements new activities in the areas of differentiated instruction, guided reading, individualized math, writing projects, and character education."

As a resident of the community in which she works, Muzi is acutely aware that her neighborhood is her student's

neighborhood, and that her colleagues are also her children's teachers. She has been active in church activities at The Church of St. Ann and has coached recreation teams for soccer and tee ball. She has led collection efforts for Homefront and the Trenton Soup Kitchen, and has been actively involved with her family in the work of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

As New Jersey Teacher of the Year, Muzi will participate in a half-year sabbatical sponsored by Educational Testing Service, from January to June 2009. The New Jersey Education Association will pay for the rental of a car for Muzi to use as she travels the state to take part in a variety of activities associated with her title.

Muzi's selection automatically enters her 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 2009.

New Jersey's Teacher of the Year program allows many talented teachers to be recognized. The process begins at the local level, where school and district level teachers of the year are chosen. County level winners are selected by the county executive superintendents of schools, who send the portfolios of their teachers of the year to Trenton. There, an 11-member panel representing state level education organizations reviews the portfolios and selects finalists, who are interviewed before the selection is made.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Attached is a [list of the 2008-09 County Teachers](#) of the Year. Also, you may call the Public Information Office for an electronic copy of Jeanne Muzi's photo.