



NJDOE News

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**For Immediate Release: October 6, 2010**

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### **Special Education Teacher from Hopatcong School District Named 2010-11 New Jersey Teacher of the Year**

Acting Commissioner of Education Rochelle R. Hendricks announced at today's monthly State Board of Education meeting that Danielle M. Kovach, a special education teacher in the Hopatcong School District in Sussex County, has been named the 2010-11 New Jersey Teacher of the Year.

Kovach, who is in her 11th year of teaching in the Hopatcong School District, is a third grade special education teacher at Hopatcong's Tulsa Trail Elementary School. She has taught nine years at Tulsa Trail " five years as a general education teacher " and began her career in the fall of 1997 as an in-class special education support teacher in Hopatcong's Durban Avenue Elementary School.

"Learn to Teach. Teach to Learn. These six simple words embody who I am as a teacher. I am a lifelong learner. I am constantly researching new ways to teach my students and deliver my lessons," wrote Kovach in her Teacher of the Year application. "...With all of my education, the most important education is that I continually learn from my students. They are the true educators and they make me the teacher that I am."

Kovach serves as her school's technology leader and has made numerous professional development presentations regarding technology. In 2001, she was a finalist in the SMART Board interactive whiteboard video contest portion of the Governor's Teacher Recognition Program. Kovach also received in 2009 the SMART Board Exemplary Educator Award.

"Danielle Kovach embodies the drive, determination and love for learning that makes an educator outstanding," said Commissioner Hendricks. "Danielle clearly strives to help others embrace and utilize technology to enhance the educational and life experiences of students in her classroom and throughout Tulsa Trail Elementary School. Her desire to be a lasting, positive influence on her students, colleagues and community makes her a shining example of the brightest and most effective educators in New Jersey."

Kovach also developed a classroom Web site " KovachKids.com " as a tool to communicate with parents of her students and with her fellow teachers. She uses the Web site as a venue to exhibit classroom projects and podcasts, and as a means to reduce the amount of paperwork that is sent home with students.

Kovach has been awarded more than \$35,000 in grants for her school and classroom during her teaching career. She recently was awarded a \$10,000 classroom makeover for her program Superheroes of Safety, which is designed to keep students safe from child predators. The program has been featured on New Jersey Network's "Classroom Close-up, NJ."

Kovach also was instrumental in earning the Tulsa Trail Elementary School the recognition of being a SMART Showcase School " one of only two schools in New Jersey to earn the designation.

"Danielle Kovach is an outstanding educator and exceptional person. She brings an abundant amount of enthusiasm to the classroom every day," said Hopatcong Superintendent Dr. Charles Maranzano Jr. "Her students are both nurtured and pushed to the highest possible outcomes due to Danielle's dedication. She excels as an educator and will be the first to tell you that she works in a very supportive and collaborative educational atmosphere. Danielle is very humble and credits everyone around her for the successes and accomplishments in her life."

More recently, Hopatcong Mayor Sylvia Petillo declared Aug. 27, 2010, as "Danielle Kovach Day" for her efforts as an educator.

In 1997, Kovach earned a Bachelor of Science in education from Kutztown University. She received a master's in special education in 2000 from East Stroudsburg University, and a master's in educational technology in

2007 from New Jersey City University.

"When I look back now at my own degrees on the wall or the total amount of grant money that I have been awarded, I realize that those achievements are not my greatest accomplishments in education," wrote Kovach in her application. "In my heart, I feel that my greatest accomplishment is the same as my teachers before me, to have an impact on the lives of my students. I delight in the sheer satisfaction of knowing that I have the capability to make a difference in the life of a child and my goal is to have a positive impact on every single one of my students."

Kovach lives in Roxbury Township, Morris County, with her husband, Mike, and her three sons, Michael, Joseph and Ryan. The Kovach family previously lived in Hopatcong.

For more information about Kovach and to access photos and videos of her, please visit the Hopatcong School District's Web site at [www.hopatcongschools.org](http://www.hopatcongschools.org).

This year's New Jersey Teacher of the Year program is sponsored by four organizations that provide valuable resources for the recipient teacher.

Educational Testing Service will provide Kovach with a laptop computer and sponsor her six-month sabbatical from January to June 2011 to enable her to travel the state and participate in a variety of activities associated with being the state Teacher of the Year. The New Jersey Education Association will pay for a rental car for Kovach to use while traveling and cover additional travel expenses, while SMART Technologies will provide a SMART Board.

The global financial institution ING is a new sponsor for 2010-11. The company will provide \$5,000 to help offset travel expenses during Kovach's term as Teacher of the Year.

Kovach automatically will be entered into the National Teacher of the Year competition, which is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). CCSSO will name the nation's top teacher in April 2011.

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 Teachers of the Year, selected by county-based panels of educators, have their portfolios submitted to the Department of Education for consideration as the New Jersey Teacher of the Year. At the state level, a 10-member panel representing state level education organizations reviews the submitted portfolios and selects finalists, who are interviewed before the selection is made.