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Del Rey teacher of the year up for county award

By Sora O'Doherty



Del Rey fourth-grade teacher Katie Sahm Photo provided

For the first time ever, according to Orinda Union School District Superintendent Carolyn Seaton, an Orinda teacher has been selected to compete for the Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year award and a chance to compete at the state level. Katie Sahm is a fourth-grade teacher at Del Rey Elementary School, and an Orinda Teacher of the Year.

As principal of Del Rey Elementary School, Kirsten Theurer says she has worked with many amazingly talented educators, and Sahm rises to the top. "Her passion for students, dedication to best practices, and her vision for building strong learning communities for students and colleagues have touched the lives of hundreds of individuals over her nine years in Orinda," according to Theurer.

Nominating Sahm, Theurer said, "From the moment Katie began teaching it was clear that she connected with students, families, and colleagues in a very special way. It wasn't an easy beginning. Stepping into her fourth-grade classroom to meet students three days after the school year started amidst angry letters from parents and unsettled students was challenging, to say the least. Katie handled it with poise and grace and quickly won over the community with her warmth and well thought out communications. From the gifted

student who fell in love with Genius Hour to the struggling student who benefited from her carefully designed curriculum and personal support, to the divergent student who grabbed on to the variety of products allowed to demonstrate mastery of standards, she is loved. She has a masterful way of knowing what students need and just how to give it to them."

Theurer went on to recount the story of a young man, a former student of Sahm's, who while at Del Rey was removed from home and placed in foster care. "It was an abrupt and sad departure," Theurer said. On a recent visit, the student let Theurer know that Sahm was his favorite teacher of all time. "She made him feel loved and safe and he would never forget her. If you were to talk to students who have had the privilege of being in Katie's class you would hear many such declarations. She builds a caring community one person at a time."

Sahm was called upon by OUSD to lead a district-wide grade level planning group. She planned professional development and worked alongside other fourth-grade teachers to ensure an aligned quality curriculum for students across the district. This strong professional learning community continues to shine.

In recommending Sahm for Teacher of the Year, Theurer concluded, "Katie embraces life. She listens fully. She thinks positively. She responds thoughtfully. When you are with her you have all of her attention, and it makes you feel valued. That is a gift she gives from her heart. "

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