

D211 POST: HOFFMAN ESTATES CHEMISTRY TEACHER NAMED STATE FINALIST FOR NATIONAL TEACHING AWARD



When Hoffman Estates High School Chemistry teacher Tanya Katovich was told she had been nominated for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, it started her on a five-month application processes. The hard work and preparation led to her being named as one of five state finalists for the nation's highest honor for mathematics and science teachers. The announcement was made during a ceremony at Fermi Lab Nov. 3.

"To be nominated for the award is a huge honor," she said. "It was overwhelming, because once you read through what they want, you realize this is not something you are going to finish in a week."

Katovich said following her nomination, she had to prepare a lengthy submission about her background and approach to teaching science. One thing she had to include was a 45-minute recording of her teaching.

"By the time I started brainstorming on what unit I was going to focus on and what lesson I was going to have them video tape, that took several months," said Katovich.

An additional part of the submission was a series of questions which focused on research style and methodology.



“There is a lot of research that goes into [the question],” she said. “Not just talk about your philosophy as a teacher, but what research is your instruction based on.”

Katovich described her philosophy focusing on backward design. In this structure, she first focuses on what the student should learn by the end of the lesson, then developing the steps to reach that objective.

Katovich has a unique tie to the award as well. A 1990 graduate of William Fremd High School, she studied physics under District 211’s first recipient of the award, Robert Grimm.



Her approach to teaching chemistry involves her students being active participants in the scientific process. She said has been a long-time proponent for national standards which were adopted by Illinois in 2016. Katovich began implementing many of the elements of the standards into her classroom in 2013. She credits a very supportive department for helping her develop her teaching style.

“Amazing things have happened to me since I arrived at Hoffman Estates High School,” she said. “I attribute that to leaders who believe in what we’re doing. I have support from my colleagues who are wonderful to work with.”

With her acceptance as a state finalist, her packet has been forwarded to a national panel which could take up to 2 years to decide. She said her competition is fierce.

“They’re very good,” she said. “I know at least two of them and they have done phenomenal things for Illinois.”

National finalists are invited to a White House dinner in their honor where they will meet with the president. They also receive a \$10,000 prize. For Katovich the biggest benefit of the award is something much more professional.

“I’ve been told, at that ceremony you get to meet educators who are very motivated just like yourself,” she said. “It creates a network of professionals who are really motivated to change education and want the best for students.”

