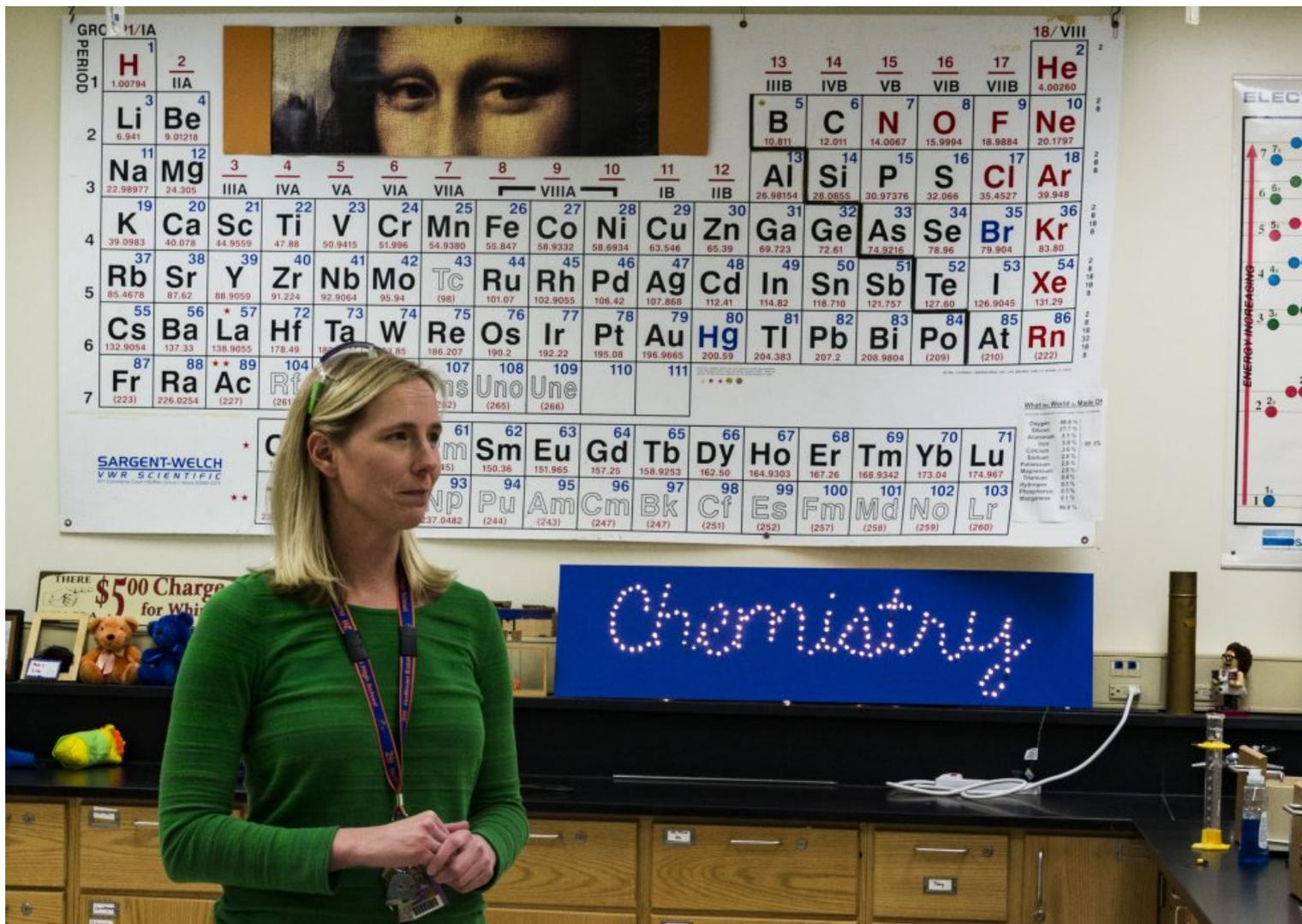


D211 POST: HOFFMAN ESTATES TEACHER RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD



On August 3, 2020, the White House announced the 2019 recipients of the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST), which are the highest honors bestowed by the United States government specifically for K-12 science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and/or computer science teaching. One of the recipients announced was Hoffman Estates High School Chemistry teacher Tanya Katovich.

Upon hearing she was a recipient, Katovich said she was overwhelmed.

“My initial reaction was to put my face in my hands and cry,” she said. “Being a PAEMST winner meant so much more to me than winning an award. The PAEMST symbolized the successful completion of a five-year journey.

She said that in 2015 she faced some personal challenges and began working with a life coach.

“He helped me set a life purpose which ended up being, ‘I want to change the way science is taught in America,’” she said. “A lofty goal for sure, but it gave me a professional goal to constantly work toward.”

District 211 Assistant Superintendent Josh Schumacher, who had recently served as Hoffman Estates High School's Principal, said Katovich always worked to be a higher quality teacher.

"Ms. Katovich demonstrates a high level of rigor in both her use of instructional methods and in the ways that she assesses her students," he said. "In addition to being an innovative and transformational classroom teacher, Tanya is also a highly reflective educator who grounds her personal growth in her value of life-long learning. We have a strong culture of reflection at Hoffman Estates High School, but I can confidently say that Tanya is easily the most reflective teacher in the building."



Katovich said that working with a high caliber of teachers at Hoffman Estates High School is what pushed her to always work harder for her students.

"I am constantly inspired by the caliber of teachers and the passion they put into their jobs," she said. "When you're surrounded by hard working people, it becomes the norm to expect more of yourself."

She added that two colleagues from HEHS stood out as ones who pushed her to always work harder.

"My principal, Josh Schumacher, continually pushed me to try new things and acknowledged the improvements taking place in my curriculum," she said. "My science department chair, Todd Meador, also gave me the green light to change

curriculum and try new things. If a lesson failed, he encouraged me to figure out why and go back in and try something different. Both administrators created an atmosphere of trust and respect for teacher decision-making. I recognize that not all school districts allow teachers to try new things and I feel very lucky to have had these opportunities.”

While Katovich’s fellow teachers and staff have been a source of inspiration for her, she noted that her students have also been a point of encouragement.

“I’ve been blessed with science students that have allowed me to push them,” she said. “I’m giving assessments that are 5-10 times harder than I ever gave in my early years of teaching. I expect my kids to write more, apply ideas to new situations, and think outside the box. The more I push, the more they give me back.”



Hoffman Estates High School Chemistry teacher Tanya Katovich (center) discusses experiment details with students during the lab portion of her class

This year marks Katovich’s second time as a nominee. In 2017 she was selected as a finalist. She said that after not being named a recipient last time she knew there was more work for her to do.

“In 2017 I was selected as a PAEMST Finalist but I hadn’t quite accomplished the work I set out to do,” she said. “I spent a lot of time between 2017 and 2019 increasing support for science teachers in Illinois and providing

professional development related to the Next Generation of Science Standards (NGSS).”

Though 2017 was Katovich’s first time as a nominee, her connection to the award goes back further. As a student at William Fremd High School, Katovich studied physics under then teacher Robert Grimm. In 1991, Grimm became the first District 211 teacher to receive the PAEMST.

Katovich said that being announced as a PAEMST recipient has brought her a sense of accomplishment.

“When I was announced as a PAEMST Finalist in the spring of 2019, I felt much closer to reaching my goal,” she said. “Being selected as the Illinois Winner meant all of that hard work paid off. After five years, I’ve completed my personal journey and it feels great.”