

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Julie Jerome
830.221.2621

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Top elementary, secondary teachers named

An elementary teacher who believes that powerful thinking can begin as early as kindergarten and a secondary teacher who believes that we are all students, separated only by age and experience, have been named 2011 Comal ISD Elementary and Secondary Teacher of the Year.

Sarah Culpepper, a kindergarten teacher in her fourth year at Rahe Bulverde Elementary School, and Kevin Howell, a language arts teacher at the Comal Discipline Center, will now advance to regionals in the Texas Education Agency's Teacher of the Year program.

After a stint in Beijing, teaching English as a Second Language, Culpepper returned to the school she attended as a child: Rahe Bulverde. She brings to her kindergarten students an innate and strong belief in multisensory learning, saying "a powerful emotional connection must be made with the material for it to stick."

One of her lessons to her students is the importance of caring for one another. In saying that, she believes she is "morally obliged to do the same." Culpepper has spent the past eight summers volunteering in orphanages and refugee camps throughout the world.

“I believe that every word I say has the potential to be eternal,” she said. “My relationship with students revolves around my placing trust in them and they in turn place their trust in me.”

For Kevin Howell, we all have a craving for knowledge that has been “exponentially fueled through the explosion of resources and availability,” specifically the World Wide Web.

“While I am still awed by this ability to obtain anything, anytime you want it, student 2.0 finds it as commonplace as lacing up a sneaker, should he actually feel compelled to do so,” Howell wrote in his essay.

So, keeping up with the technological times, plus a panache for pop culture helps Kevin maintain credibility with the students.

“If you can put aside these preconceptions and prejudices and remember this, you will find that your life becomes much easier, as students will become more eager to share with you and give you their best effort,” he said.

Kelly Yoe, an educational assistant at Garden Ridge Elementary School, and Terre Sawey, a transportation dispatcher at the Smithson Valley Middle School “hub,” won the district’s 2011 Support Personnel of the Year.

Some 400 employees and members of their families were lauded on Thursday at the annual employee appreciation banquet. Forty retirees, representing more than 1,000 years of service, were recognized and employees were given 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30-year service pins.