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Brandywine teacher takes top honor

17-year veteran says she tries to make high school math fun

By *JENNIFER PRICE*
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DOVER -- Teaching is in Mary Pinkston's blood. She grew up watching her mother teach social studies for 40 years and even had her as a first-grade teacher.

"My parents and family were my first teachers and always encouraged learning and education" Pinkston, 42, said Tuesday night after being named Delaware's 2010 Teacher of the Year.

The 17-year veteran, who teaches math in grades nine through 12 at Brandywine High School, received the award in a ceremony attended by about 450 educators and state leaders at Dover Downs Hotel and Conference Center.

The state's other 19 district teachers of the year also were honored.

Pinkston will be Delaware's nominee for the national Teacher of the Year contest and will speak with community groups, business leaders and policymakers about Delaware schools.

Brandywine High Principal Al Thompson praised Pinkston.

"When you describe good teachers, they all have these adjectives: organized, prepared, dedicated and fair," he said. "She has them all. She constantly relates the subject matter to the real world. You don't feel like you are in a math class."

Pinkston has spent her entire career in the Brandywine district, teaching at Mount Pleasant High and Concord High before coming to Brandywine High in 1994. She was Brandywine High's teacher of the year in 2002 and is a national board-certified teacher.

In 1992, she received her bachelor's degree in secondary mathematics education from the University of Delaware. Three years later, she earned a master's in education curriculum and instruction from UD, specializing in secondary mathematics.

Pinkston will receive a \$5,000 state grant to use for the educational benefit of her students, and two personal grants totaling an additional \$5,000. All district winners receive \$2,000 grants.

Last year's winner, Mark Teesdale, spoke Tuesday of his experience meeting President Barack Obama, second lady Jill Biden and speaking to groups about the importance of arts education.

"This has been the most amazing year of my life and teaching career, said Teesdale, a general music and chorus teacher at Lake Forest's Central Elementary School.

This year's 20 nominees were chosen from nearly 7,500 public school teachers. For the first time, the charter school network also nominated a candidate.

The nominees had to submit detailed portfolios illustrating their teaching philosophies. Five "readers" from the state Department of Education reviewed the portfolios, and a former state or district teacher of the year and a DOE staffer observed each candidate in the classroom.

Using those scores, an independent panel composed of the current state Teacher of the Year, the state Congress of Parents and Teachers president, the state Student Council Association president, a Delaware State Education Association representative; a state Chamber of Commerce representative, the state Board of Education president, and the professional standards board chairman chose the winner.

Pinkston said she tries to make math relevant and use humor.

"There are no greater awards for me than when I see students' eyes light up when they finally understand the concept, grow to become independent learners, begin to appreciate math and express gratitude about how much they've learned," she said.
