Press Release
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CAPRISTRANO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANNOUNCES HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

SAN JUAN CAPRISTRANO – A surprise visit to Dana Hills High School (DHHS) by CUSD Board President Amy Hanacek, Board Clerk Martha McNicholas, Superintendent Kirsten Vital and Capistrano Unified Educators Association President Sally White was made to announce Science Teacher Kristine Clark as this year’s High School Teacher of the Year for the Capistrano Unified School District.

Along with Principal Jason Alleman, the group headed to Ms. Clark’s classroom to share the news with her and her students. “You are truly a classroom innovator offering your students a relevant education in whatever science class you teach and a pioneer in creating a new course,” stated President Hanacek. You create learning experiences for your students that are obviously meaningful in so many ways and the respect that you have from those students and appreciative parents is obvious and warranted.”

“You engage students in real and authentic ways in the classroom and that clearly has a lasting impact on their lives,” stated Superintendent Kirsten Vital. “It is an honor for me to be here to share this news with your students. Your experience, your accomplishments and your heart for teaching make you deserving of this great honor.”

CSI-type murder investigations, hands on global warming research and experiments…these are just some of the opportunities students can expect when they enter Clark’s classroom. A science teacher at Dana Hills High for the past 11 years, Clark ignites excitement and thoroughly engages her learners. With an undergraduate degree in biochemistry and a master’s degree in chemistry, she is extremely well versed in her subjects. Nevertheless, she constantly pursues additional knowledge and seeks new ways to enhance her programs. Her summers are often spent studying and conducting research at local universities as well as contributing to a variety of scientific publications.
One of Clark’s summer endeavors has resulted in a two year grant from the National Science Foundation Research in Undergraduate Institutions program. This NSF-RUI funding enables Dana Hills’ biotechnology students to collaborate with Dr. Madeline Rasche’s studies on methanogens at California State University at Fullerton. Dr. Rasche and Ms. Clark will spend a month guiding the high school students through college level laboratory work, after which, two DHHS students will be given four week paid internships to conduct further research with Dr. Rasche. Few high school programs offer such incredible opportunities.

Clark clearly works to impart knowledge, but she also fosters a genuine enthusiasm for learning. In her quest to teach subjects that authentically appeal to students, she has developed two completely new classes and curricula for Capistrano Unified. One is the University of California approved Biotechnology course (mentioned above) and the other is Forensics. In preparation for the latter, Clark stages crime scenes around campus and instructs students in proper data gathering and crime investigation. According to her Principal, Jason Alleman, students are captivated as they learn proper methodology through real world interactions. In these, and in all of her classes, Clark connects with her pupils on an individual level. Her goal is to be “a motivator, a listener, a counselor…as students try to navigate the rough road of high school and the transition to adulthood.” In the words of former student Mona Mosavi, “Both inside and outside of the classroom, students could come to her for advice, whether it was about the next exam or a struggle they were dealing with at home.”

Clark will represent CUSD at the Orange County Department of Education Teachers of the Year program where four teachers will be selected to move on to the California Department of Education Teacher of the Year program.

Pictures are available on our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/CapoUnified/ or by request.

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