Outstanding Teacher Award

Carrie Rugenstein

Lincoln High School

Owosso Public Schools

Owosso, Michigan

I know I am preaching to the choir when I say teachers do not enter the field of education for the money. People who choose to work in education, especially alternative education, are passionate about making a difference. In the case of alternatives, they are dedicated to reaching students that others have given up on. Often the students themselves have this opinion. It requires unique skills to reach, and invest students in, what is required by the state’s adopted Michigan Merit Curriculum. Of the challenges faced by teachers in this regard, it is Algebra II that usually first comes to mind. MAEO’s 2016 Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award goes to math (including Algebra II) teacher, Carrie Rugenstein.

Fellow teachers and other staff in our schools often see nominating a person for an award as a great way to show appreciation and honor the hard work of a colleague. However, it is rare that our “constituency” recognizes the value of these awards. Lincoln High School student Alana Lavery is the exception. She saw nominating her math teacher Mrs. Rugenstein, as an “example of our appreciation for everything she has done for all of us here at Lincoln, she deserves this award and recognition.” Alana’s praise for Carrie does not stop with her general comments, she gives example after example of how she has aided her in changing her life and helping her to make healthier decisions for her future.

High praise for Carrie’s impact on his/her life does not stop with Alana. Several students from Carrie’s classes added their letters of support. Student Chance Howard stated: “When I began my journey at Lincoln I hated school and I hated math even more. Then I met Mrs. Rugie (as the students fondly refer to her). She changed my outlook on math and showed me I was capable of learning math and succeeding in her class. It felt amazing to finally feel as if I could accomplish something in math, and that even if I messed up, I would not be judged.” That theme of not being embarrassed or judged is evident in all of the letters of support submitted by students. Student Sandy Huff states: “The reason I feel so comfortable in Mrs. Rugenstein’s classroom is how understanding she can be. She has always treated me with respect and decency.” Student Mariah Berry added to these comments by saying. “The best feature she has a teacher is how she connects with the students. She teaches in a way that the students actually pay attention. She is what people view as an outstanding teacher.”

This view is shared by Mrs. Rugenstein’s colleagues as well as the administrator at Lincoln. Principal Steve Irelan wrote: I have known Mrs. Rugenstein for many years and truly value what her leadership and mentorship means for students, especially students who do not have natural supports in their lives.  She is an authentic guide and provides them a sense of calm and a sense of direction which leads them to better outcomes.  As evidence, this nomination process was led by students who appreciate Mrs. Rugenstein for all she means to them.”

CONGRATULATIONS Carrie!