

Education Minnesota

Osseo special education support professional named 2020-21 Education Support Professional of the Year

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ST. PAUL, Minn., Nov. 18, 2020 – Education Minnesota is celebrating American Education Week by honoring Michelle Dennard, a special education support professional at the Osseo Education Center, as the 2020-21 Education Minnesota Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year.

Dennard has worked for 16 years in Osseo schools with special education students.

A virtual celebration will take place for Dennard tonight via Zoom at 6:30 p.m. Media are invited to the formal program and can use this link to attend: <https://edmn.zoom.us/j/96193884684?pwd=dWVBTTThBU2Noc1NNYytES1ZraFdaUT09>

“I am known for taking on the more challenging students,” she said, in her application materials for the award. “I make sure that all students’ overall needs are met, regardless of their level, race or gender, and that they have the tools to succeed.”

Dennard currently works at Osseo Education Center, a federal setting IV school that serves students ages 17-21 who have significant educational needs requiring a separate site to receive special education services.

“Michelle is an ESP who is focused on recognizing strengths of scholars so they can use those strengths to overcome the challenges they face in our society,” said Angela VanHee, administrator at Osseo Education Center, in her award recommendation letter for Dennard. “She builds relationships that results in students feeling valued and confident.”

As the new Minnesota ESP of the Year, Dennard will receive a \$1,200 honorarium and her choice of a Chromebook, iPad or other tablet. She will also be nominated for the National Education Association’s ESP of the Year and will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to the awards ceremony, if held in person.



“ESPs are often the first people that interact with our students each day and the last ones to say goodbye,” said Education Minnesota President Denise Specht. “Michelle has dedicated her life to supporting her students, both in the classroom and out. In addition, her leadership in her district and in her union makes sure that all students, and educators, are seen and have their voices heard.”

Her district’s equity and positive behavioral interventions and supports teams are something Dennard has taken on leadership roles in, but that equity lens has also been a big priority for her union work.

Dennard is the Education Minnesota Osseo ESP local union vice president and has created an affinity group for ESPs of Color, to network and discuss school and union issues.

Dennard is also in her second term as an ESP At-Large seat on Education Minnesota’s Governing Board and was recently elected to the board’s Executive Committee, the union’s highest leadership position. Dennard is the first ESP and member of color to sit on the committee in many years.

The winner of the Education Support Professional of the Year award is selected by a five-member selection committee that includes three leaders of Education Minnesota, the winner in the previous year and a representative of an external organization.

About Education Minnesota

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