

Gayla Bennett Receives Excellence In Teaching Award

by Chris Mitchell

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GRANITE CITY - Coolidge 8th-grade Special Education Social Studies Teacher **Gayla Bennett** has been selected as one of Emerson's 2023 Excellence in Teaching Award recipients.

Bennett, who is in her 25th year of service in Granite City Community Unit School District #9, all at Coolidge, is among more than 80 teachers from across the St. Louis metropolitan area who are being recognized this year through the program as examples of truly outstanding educational excellence.

"What I love most about my job is building bonds with students! 8th grade is such a pivotal year for students, and I love being there to help them through this important

time," Bennett said. "My goal in my classroom every year is for students to feel welcome, cared for, and supported. I start day one showing them respect and that I'm on their side."

The Emerson Excellence in Teaching Awards, now in its 34th year, is one of the St. Louis region's most recognized teacher recognition programs. Emerson is proud to sponsor this program as a way of helping the St. Louis community express our collective admiration and gratitude for your dedication to teaching our area's students.

"Emerson Electric believes in the impact of teachers on their students, and Ms. Bennett exemplifies this. She truly believes in her students and understands that school is also a home away from home," said GCSD9 Superintendent **Stephanie M. Cann**. "GCSD9 is so incredibly fortunate to have educators like Ms. Bennett who understand that we need to address the "whole child" to make a positive educational influence."

Bennett, who teaches in a co-teach classroom, a cross-categorical classroom, and resource, has been the Coolidge National Junior Honor Society sponsor for the past seven years. She is also assisting with the Coolidge production of Mary Poppins, Jr. and keeps the scorebook for Coolidge boys and girls basketball and girls volleyball. Previously she served as sponsor for Coolidge Student Council.

Bennett graduated with a bachelor's degree in special education from MacMurray College in 1999, and earned her master's degree in educational leadership from McKendree University in 2009.

"Ms. Bennett is an exceptional educator and a tremendous asset to our school district. I am thankful to have her be a part of the CJHS family," said Coolidge Principal **Pat Curry**. "Ms. Bennett is as genuine a person as you will come across and this is evident in the relationships she has built with her students and our staff. She goes above and beyond in the classroom and routinely participates in extracurricular events throughout our building."

She received an engraved crystal apple from Tiffany & Co., and was recognized at the Nov. 14 GCSD9 School Board Meeting.

"As the NJHS sponsor, our students conduct several community service projects throughout the school year that benefit our families and our school community. Ms. Bennett is truly deserving of this recognition," Curry added.

For more information about Granite City School District #9, visit www.gcsd9.net.

