

# Cov. names its top teacher

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COVENTRY — Coventry's Teacher of the Year award went to Laurie Masterson, a middle level teacher in Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry's Support Services program.

Nominated for the teacher of the year within the middle school last year, it was no surprise that she was chosen for the whole district, said Principal Dr. Michael Almeida.

"Laurie is an incredible person, first of all," he said. "She continues to strive to help others first of all and I think that's in all areas of her life."

Masterson is not only respected and loved by her students, but by their parents, by her colleagues within the school, throughout the district and across the state, Almeida said.

"She's national board certified, she's been a trainer for the state, for this faculty and a mentor in this district and she has always been a life-long learner."

Her ability to work with students with diverse developmental disabilities and meet their needs individually is amazing, he continued. "She's just something special."

Insistently modest, Masterson says she was much honored to be chosen as teacher of the year. "It was so surreal," she said, describing the moment when James Erinakes, assistant superintendent of student services, announced the award at teacher orientation.

"He said a lot of nice things about me," she said, "but I didn't need them to say all that."

Crediting her teacher assistants who help every day, the opportunities present at the middle school and the community that supports her, Masterson refuses to be flattered.

The student support program gives students opportunities to broaden their world, Masterson said. Her classes adapt all the grade span expectations for her students; they focus on concrete ways to learn language, vocation, mathematics and life skills.

"We give kids a lot of support through technology, visual cues, sign language to encourage total communication," she said.

The middle school also includes her students on the teams. The students that Masterson was working with on Thursday were members of the "Obsidian Team," she said.

With her students sitting around the table in her classroom, Masterson read through "Dream," a book that focuses on the dreams students have about their future life and who they want to be when they grow up.

The story book is a part of the eighth grade curriculum at the middle school, she added and she has modified it so her students can join the discussion.





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Laurie Masterson (back, center), recently named this year's Coventry Teacher of the Year for the district, appears with students and teachers Betty Thompson (from left), Maria Ferreira, Nicolas Hoskins, McKinley Blalock, Denaija McGee, Patrick Delehandty, Billy Potter, Kimberly Cote and Maryanne Medeiros.

# Coventry honors its Teacher of the Year

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"We give them concrete terms [about what they want to be when they grow up] and help them to talk about it over and over," she said.

Dreaming, Masterson told her students, is different from doing. But in order to do, you

have to dream beforehand.

Working with her students has its challenges, she admits. "There are lots of parts that are not fun.

"But what inspires me is to see a student accomplish something — even when it takes them a long time to do it — that allows them

to be understood by their peers. Whether that is being mobile, communicating or simply understanding and following the rules."

One of her favorite parts of a good day, Masterson added, is when they end classes with knock-knock jokes that each student made up themselves.