



NEWS RELEASE

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Mercedes Muñoz Named 2020 Oregon Teacher of the Year

Special education teacher receives top honor for her advocacy and leadership

(Portland, Ore.) – In a surprise assembly today, Franklin High School (FHS) special education educator Mercedes Muñoz was named Oregon’s 2020 Teacher of the Year. Director of the Oregon Department of Education Colt Gill was joined by Portland Public Schools Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero and Franklin High Principal Chris Frazier in honoring Muñoz for the encouragement, equity and voice she offers to her students every day.

“Great educators are at the heart of student success in Oregon’s public schools,” said Governor Kate Brown. “What Mercedes has done to advance equity and inclusion at Franklin High School, especially with students from historically underserved communities, is a great example of the standard we must continue to strive for to ensure that every student in Oregon, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to learn and achieve.”

As a learning specialist at FHS since 2013, Muñoz has been instrumental in the development and implementation of the special education push-in model. Muñoz is a member of the FHS Equity Team, as well as the FHS Safety and Poetry Slam committees. She is also highly involved in the recruitment of historically underserved students in Franklin’s Advanced Placement Program.

“Every student deserves a teacher who is unwaveringly committed to their success,” said Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education. “As a special education teacher, Mercedes delivers daily hope and encouragement to a wide range of students with varying academic, social and emotional needs. I look forward to her impact as a model for all teachers across our state this coming year.”

In a letter of recommendation, Muñoz was referred to as “a force of nurture.” In her role as department lead for special education at FHS, Muñoz is seen as a champion in advocating for the learning needs of all students and ensuring they are seen, heard and prepared for the transition from high school.



“Teaching requires excellence and grace, which means staying up to read the article that will inform your instruction for weeks to come,” said Muñoz. “Teaching is so much more than issuing a grade or collecting an assignment. Teaching is a revolutionary act of social justice that empowers children to evolve and grow.”

[The Oregon Teacher of the Year program](#) is sponsored by the Oregon Department of Education in partnership with the Oregon Lottery. Muñoz was awarded 2020 Regional Teacher of the Year in May, and receives a \$5,000 cash award as 2020 Oregon Teacher of the Year. A matching \$5,000 is also awarded to FHS. “The Lottery is proud to play a role in helping reward educators for the passion and dedication they provide to their students and communities,” said Oregon Lottery Director Barry Pack.

The Oregon Teacher of the Year is selected after an extensive application process. Nominees from schools throughout Oregon submitted packets of information including testimonials and letters of support from administrators, students and colleagues. From the written material, applicants were assessed on leadership, instructional expertise, community involvement, understanding of educational issues, professional development and vision.

As the 2020 Oregon Teacher of the Year, Muñoz will serve as a spokesperson and representative for all Oregon teachers. She will attend the Washington Recognition Week for Teachers of the Year in Washington, D.C. this spring in addition to receiving year-long professional development and networking with other state Teachers of the Year.

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