

Pataskala Standard

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Kirkersville teacher recognized as Leader for Learning

By Chad Klimack
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A Kirkersville Elementary teacher was honored for her classroom dedication. Jennifer Johnson received a Licking County Foundation Leaders for Learning Award.



Megan Evans, a grant administrator with The Licking County Foundation, presents Kirkersville Elementary first-grade teacher Jennifer Johnson with a Leaders for Learning Award. The Foundation annually hands out the award to one teacher from each public school district in the county. (Photo: Chad Klimack/The Standard)

KIRKERSVILLE – When Jennifer Johnson stepped into her classroom on April 17, she had no idea her first-grade students would be applauding her and patting her on the back prior to lunch.

That was the case, though, after a representative from The Licking County Foundation, Kirkersville Principal Alissa Horstman and Southwest Licking Local Schools Superintendent Robert Jennell surprised Johnson with one of the Foundation's Leaders for Learning awards.

The Foundation annually hands out the awards to teachers who exemplify excellence in their field. Superintendents or building principals from each of the county's public schools select the recipients.

Horstman said Johnson fits the Foundation's criteria.

"She is positive about everything, and she puts so much time into making sure each kid gets what they need to fit their educational needs," Horstman said. "Even if she's not happy about something, she's always smiling."

This is Johnson's first year teaching first grade at Kirkersville, but she previously taught first grade in the district for 12 years.

Johnson was presented with a glass apple, the symbolic half of the award.

"It was really a big surprise," Johnson said.

Still, Johnson said she did not decide to become a teacher because she wanted to win awards. She was motivated by wanting to teach youngsters.

"I always wanted to work with kids," she said. "There's a joy in seeing the growth in them from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."

Horstman said Johnson's constant positive outlook is inspiring to her students.

Some of those students, aside from clapping and cheering after Johnson received her award, raced up and hugged her. At that moment, it was obvious how much the students liked their teacher.

Outside of the classroom, Horstman credited Johnson with helping Kirkersville implement a new grade-banding model Southwest Licking Local Schools put into place this school year. The model replaced the district's former neighborhood schools with grade-centric schools.

"She has always been our first-grade lead teacher," Horstman said. "She runs meetings with our first-grade teachers, and she was one of the people who really spearheaded (the philosophy), 'We're one team, not three.'"

Aside from receiving a glass apple, recipients of the Leaders for Learning Award receive a \$500 grant. They also can apply for future grants totaling up to \$500. Award recipients can use the grant money for professional development or classroom materials.

Locally, Johnson was not the only teacher to be recognized.

Shawn Walter, a fifth-grade science teacher at Licking Heights North Elementary, also received a Leaders for Learning Award.

Walter, according to the Foundation, has used music in his classroom to engage students and to help them remember information, such as facts about their solar system. He also uses technology-based curriculum to connect with his students.