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Orinda teacher of the year is a finalist for county teacher of the year

By Sora O'Doherty



Michelle Goode, Del Rey Elementary School, finalist candidate for Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year. Photo Sora O'Doherty

Michelle Goode, an inclusion specialist at Orinda Union School District, was named one of five Orinda teachers of the year and is also one of four finalists from whom two will be selected as Contra Costa County Teachers of the Year. The 52nd annual Contra Costa County Teachers of the Year celebration will be held at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek on Thursday, Sept. 19.

In addition to Goode, who is a multi-site teacher, the teachers of the year for the Orinda elementary schools were named at the OUSD meeting on April 15. The teachers of the year are Kelly Trestrail, Second Grade Teacher, Del Rey Elementary School; Heather Tiraschi, Fourth Grade Teacher, Glorietta Elementary School; Jennifer Plumley, Second Grade Teacher, Sleepy Hollow Elementary School; and Dianna Burns, Kindergarten Teacher, Wagner Ranch Elementary School. In addition, Alison Waterman, Sixth Grade Core Teacher, was named teacher of the year for Orinda Intermediate School.

Goode is based at Del Rey elementary, but also serves students at Sleepy Hollow, Wagner Ranch, and Glorietta elementary schools. She says that she is dedicated to the concept that all students belong in school, including students with disabilities. She collaborates with teachers about the best practices for inclusion. Goode had high praise for OUSD's instructional assistants who work in the classrooms.

After earning an undergraduate degree in journalism at Boston University, she obtained her teaching credential at San Francisco State, where she loved the program. OUSD was her first teaching position, and she is in her eighth year there. She lives in Martinez.

She notes that "A lot of school districts are moving towards more inclusive programs where people who are neurotypical get more experience with people who may be different." She added, "If I weren't a strong advocate for inclusiveness, I wouldn't be in this job, but I think that everything has to be student centered and individualized; no one size fits all" in education.

Goode explained that everyone wants to feel that they belong, and even when full inclusion won't work, there are ways for those with disabilities to have access to their neurotypical peers. She conducts what she calls "push in" or "pull out" programs that either help a student within the classroom or outside of it. She affirms her belief that the school and the parents are partners, and if parents aren't happy, she is willing to come to the table to discuss options. She also feels strongly that kids should be attending their local schools.

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