

Manistee teacher wins American Legion Zone 4 Teacher of the Year award

Teacher to kids: 'If I can do it, you can do it'

[Kyle Kotecki](#), Manistee News Advocate May 27, 2021 Updated: May 27, 2021 9:36 a.m.



1of3

Brian Morrison, American Legion Education and Scholarship Committee member (left), and Gary Walter, vice commander of the Legion for the state of Michigan, present Kennedy Elementary's Tanya Hunter the Zone 4 Teacher of the Year award in front of the school on Wednesday.

Kyle Kotecki/News Advocate

MANISTEE — Tanya Hunter's fifth-grade students at Kennedy Elementary School enjoyed an opportunity Wednesday to get out of the classroom, get some fresh air and — best of all — see their teacher receive the American Legion Education and Scholarship Committee's Zone 4 Teacher of the Year

award.

Committee member Brian Morrison and Gary Walter, vice commander of the American Legion for the state of Michigan, were on hand to give Hunter the award and a cash prize of \$500.

Morrison said forms were sent out to the school districts in Zone 4 asking for nominees, and the superintendents sent them back with their recommendations.

"The forms are reviewed by a staff member, who this year happened to be me. I looked them over and said (Hunter's) was the best representation of what we consider the prerequisites," he said. "There has to be teaching competence, community involvement and what we call Americanism — teaching the kids about what it means to be an American, not just flag waving and patriotism, but a little bit deeper than that."

There are a total of five zones in Michigan.

"Zone 4 is from Ludington, to Muskegon, over to Newaygo County, Lake City, all the way up to the bridge, Bay City," Walter said.

Hunter said she was excited not only for the award, but for the opportunity to show her students that dedication can lead to success.

"Receiving the Teacher of the Year award just shows that all the hard work I've put in year and year and day after day has paid off. I'm making a difference," she said. "The kids being part of it was awesome, because they can see when you have hard work and determination, you can achieve goals.

"If I can do it, you can do it, and I tell them that regularly. I came from an unwealthy family, struggled growing up, and look at where I am today. Just to teach them that lesson is more important than anything else I could ever do."

Kennedy principal Joanie Wiersma was excited to see Hunter receive some well-deserved recognition.

"I think that Mrs. Hunter has really demonstrated what a teacher embodies, and that's going beyond the academics into the well-being of a child and really focusing on the social-emotional, and the relationships," Wiersma said. "This was a big year and she invested in those kids and it's paid off. ... We're super proud of her."

Hunter said her students have already started making suggestions for how she can utilize her prize money.

"The kids want pizza. They said, 'We helped you get here; we would like some pizza,'" she said. "I'm sure I'll share a little bit with this group in some way like that — maybe ice cream bars or something — but the majority is going to go toward something that's going to last and be there for years, whether it's for them to take home or something that's used every day in the classroom."

Hunter said she wants to use her prize money to benefit students for years to come.

"I don't want it to be something that's here today, gone tomorrow. I really have to put some thought into it — especially because we've been approved for a new building," she said. "There's going to be some teardown and shifting around, so I want to make sure it's something that can remain even after that happens. I thought about using all the money to purchase books for my students to just have and take home, I've thought about flexible seating for the future classes.

"I've got some ideas, but nothing definite yet. Too many things are up in the air."

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