

News Release

Everett Public Schools
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Barney Peterson named as one of nation's top teachers

James Monroe Elementary teacher receives 2006 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching

Barney Peterson, from James Monroe Elementary School in Everett, is the recipient of the 2006 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, the nation's highest honor for teaching in these fields. Peterson is the only winner from Washington, and one of only 93 teachers nationwide to receive the prestigious award.



In a citation given to Peterson, President Bush commended her for embodying excellence in teaching, for devotion to the learning needs of the students, and for upholding the high standards that exemplify American education at its finest.

With innovative lesson plans, Peterson teaches, engages and captivates her students who become enthusiastic about science and other learning. She describes a class favorite, "our yearlong unit on the life cycle and habitat needs of Pacific salmon. We raise approximately 400 Coho in our classroom tank, and students learn why it is important to understand life cycles. Through this, they develop a sense of stewardship for the environment.

Her principal Gerard Holzman sees Peterson as a teacher who matches student learning needs with community resources and transforms that pairing into catalytic learning. Barney took a look at the development and growth in this region. Through her environmental and governmental contacts, she arranged for students to catalog and harvest native plants, learning about the science of life cycles and strengthening their reading, writing, and math skills at the same time. As a partner with the County, Barney's other class projects have mapped and cataloged valuable land set aside by developers "a project that protects local resources, saves taxpayer money, and deepened students' academic and science knowledge.

One of Peterson's frequent community partners is Suzi Wong Swint, Watershed Education Program Coordinator for Snohomish County Surface Water Management. Barney has a knack for teaching her students how to 'wonder' about issues. In her classroom, students connect textbook concepts with situations in the real world and vice versa. That's such a powerful combination. I teach youth and adults, and honestly, some of the best questions I've ever had have come from Barney's fourth-grade students.

As a science teacher, Peterson meets the challenge of engaging students with innovative curriculum and making an intimidating subject like science understandable, even irresistible, to her students. Confucius said, 'I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.' I firmly believe in this quote, so I incorporate many hands-on activities into my class, because the more opportunities my students have to apply what they are learning, the better the chance that they will make sense of it all.

In addition to being exceptional mathematics and science teachers, Presidential Awardees also are leaders, mentors and scholars in their community. Last April, Peterson was sponsored by the American Geophysical Union and the European Geophysical Union as one of four teacher-delegates from the United States to attend the Geophysical Information for Teachers workshop in Vienna, Austria. In preparation for the upcoming International Polar Year (IPY), the focus of that workshop was Polar Science. Upon returning, Peterson presented what she learned to the Washington Science Teachers Association to inspire more teachers to use the IPY to excite student learning.

In a letter to Awardees, President Bush said, Math and science are critical components of America's technological and competitive strength. Established by Congress in 1983, the annual Presidential Awards program identifies highly qualified mathematics and science teachers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Territories, and the U.S. Department of Defense Schools. This year's recipients "recommended for the award by a panel of leading mathematicians, scientists and educators "are K-6th grade teachers.

The Presidential Award's application process gave me an opportunity to critically examine my teaching by asking myself, 'What are you doing? Why are you doing it?' and 'How will it impact my students' learning?' These questions have helped me analyze, reflect and then improve upon my teaching, said Peterson, when asked why she applied.

As an awardee, Peterson received a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the federal agency that administers the awards program on behalf of The White House, and an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, DC, for a week of celebratory events and professional development activities.

Read the article in the [May 29, 2007](#) edition of *The Herald*.