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Breckenridge Educators Named Recipients of \$15,000 Award for Excellence

Stacy Busta and Sarah Kratcha, co-teachers from Breckenridge Elementary in Breckenridge Public Schools were surprised April 10 with news that they were recipients of a 2017 WEM Outstanding Educator Award for Teacher Achievement, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Busta and Kratcha are two of seven educators being honored by the WEM Foundation and Synergy & Leadership Exchange for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student learning. They are recipients of the Teacher Achievement Award, which recognizes exemplary teachers who support, inspire and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement.

Busta has been teaching for 17 years and Kratcha has been teaching for 9 years. Together the two co-teach in a fifth grade classroom at Breckenridge Elementary. The classroom, referred to as Studio 5, is a project based learning classroom where the two of them facilitate the learning for 40 students as a team.

Inspired by their grant writing, the two viewed the movie, "Most Likely to Succeed" which led them to reflect on the fact that education had not changed in more than 100 hundred years. What was good for students 100 years ago probably was not meeting the needs of students in the 21st century. In preparation for the 21st century skills necessary to succeed in the future workplace, they looked to set up a project based learning environment to engage students while allowing for deeper learning. Students in their classroom are engaged on a daily basis in projects involving science, social studies, and language arts.

"The results of Studio 5 are engaged learners, fewer classroom and behavioral issues, students discovering and pursuing their passions, and kids learning at their personal ability instead of "teaching to the mean" like in a traditional classroom to name a few of the very many positives," shared a colleague.

Busta and Kratcha were an integral part of the culture shift in the school district because of their success with Studio 5. Their school is adopting project based learning throughout the K-12 classrooms and is already seeing positive effects just months later.

In addition to the *Teacher Achievement Award*, two honorees are recognized with the *Ethics in Education Award* (exemplary educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum) and two with the *Academic Challenge Coach Award* (classroom teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges approved by the Minnesota Academic League Council).

Educators are first nominated for the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program by students, parents, colleagues or community members. Those who accept the nomination provide additional information for consideration by Synergy & Leadership Exchange and a blue ribbon selection panel, which reviews and ranks the nominees.

In addition to the seven statewide honorees, additional educators have been selected as regional honorees for 2017. These names will be announced in May.

Synergy & Leadership Exchange (Synergy) is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering collaboration to advance the development of ethical citizens, providing educational resources, and celebrating achievement and best practices in Minnesota schools, businesses and communities.

For more information on the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program and Synergy & Leadership Exchange, visit: www.synergyexchange.org.