

May 3, 2019  
For immediate release

*For additional information:*  
Leah Garry, Synergy & Leadership Exchange  
Phone: 507-389-5115

## **Buffalo Educator Named Recipient of \$15,000 Award for Excellence**

Melanie Olson, a teacher at Parkside Elementary School in the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools, was surprised May 3 with the news that she is a recipient of a 2019 WEM Outstanding Educator Award for Teacher Achievement, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Olson is one of six educators being honored by the WEM Foundation and Synergy & Leadership Exchange for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student learning. She is one of two 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.

Olson has been teaching for 13 years and currently teaches grades 2-4 in a multi-age classroom. Additionally, she has served four years on the board of directors for the Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented. Olson manages the MEGT social media and serves as a conference committee co-chair.

“Mrs. Olson’s classroom consists of highly gifted students who are accelerated at least one grade level in mathematics, and who read well above their age grade level,” said Principal Michelle Robinson. “Her students’ high level of achievement does not deter her in any way from fostering ongoing growth and development in her students — both academically and social-emotionally.”

Eager to give her students more and intentionally integrate active, hands-on learning opportunities for students, Olson created a Makerspace. The Makerspace inspires students to learn about electrical systems, woodworking, needlework, knitting, cross stitch, sewing, soldering, jewelry making, and book arts, while using tools like, hand drills, soldering irons, screwdrivers, wrenches, hot glue guns, wire strippers, saws and metal stamping kits.

Another practice Olson encourages is for students to aspire to give back by connecting their learning to their daily lives as well as their local and global community. Through project based learning, students are asked to create a positive change in their community. Many community leaders volunteered to speak directly with her students about how individuals can be catalysts for change and what it takes to make a change in your community or local government. The community was then invited into the school for a student showcase, celebrating student achievement. A number of projects had an impact that has lasted for years.

“Mrs. Olson is committed to the whole student,” shared a colleague. “In her multi-age classroom, individual student needs are met through strategic differentiation. Students are actively engaged and challenged in learning that has been targeted for their needs in all content areas. She does this so masterfully.”

In addition to the *Teacher Achievement Award*, other educators are being honored with the *Academic Challenge Coach Award* (teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges), *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 *Athletic Coach Award* (teachers who are exemplary coaches of athletic teams).

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 six statewide honorees, additional educators have been selected as regional honorees for 2019. These honorees will be announced in May. Synergy & Leadership Exchange 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](http://www.synergyexchange.org).