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## 2005-2006 Sacramento City Unified School District Teachers of the Year

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The next National Teacher of the Year could very well be one of the two outstanding teachers selected this year to represent Sac City in the first phase of the Teacher of the Year competition.



**Jennifer Hughes**, an instructor for eight years, teaches a split first/second grade class at John Bidwell Elementary School.

With ten years in the classroom, **Michael Holt** teaches eighth grade at California Middle.



Hughes, in describing her teaching philosophy in an essay she submitted, said her purpose as a teacher is to help students "dig for the gold." The gold being strengths and talents that make them unique from any other person.

"Each child requires a different strategy for finding their 'gold,' and once it is found, they are in a position to make choices of how they want their learning process to go," Hughes said.

She added that she often asks students how they would like to learn a lesson or what would they like to learn next. "The power of these questions is unbelievable, and the results even more so," she stated. "It has become very clear to me that what motivates children lies within this philosophy. Everything I teach stems from this."

According to Hughes, what inspires one student may be entirely different than what moves another, and children should always be given an opportunity to discover the purpose of what they are learning. "They also need to connect that purpose with their lives," she adds. "Without a purpose, there is no connection. Without a connection, there is no further motivation to learn."



Sharing her skills and her philosophy is an important aspect of her career. As an educator, she states she is continually in the position of learning, but she also helps incoming educators to learn as well. For the past four years, Hughes has opened her door to Sacramento State University supervisors. "It's such a great feeling to share your philosophy with others as well as the mistakes you've learned from."

Being involved with education outside the classroom is an integral part of her teaching role. While teaching kindergarten, she witnessed the need for improving kindergarten readiness. That experience spurred her to teach a summer pre-start program. She went on to present a preschool/kindergarten seminar where she shared strategies with preschool and kindergarten teachers.

"Teaching is rewarding in a variety of ways," said Hughes. "It's the little things each day, like your children forgetting it's time for recess because they're engulfed in a lesson. Better yet, it's your students feeling sad instead of jumping for joy when you tell them they'll have a substitute the next day."

Hughes knows it's those moments that are rewarding. "It's those little things that add up to one big thing – I love teaching," she said.

John Bidwell Principal Charlotte Chadwick was thrilled to learn Hughes was selected as a Teacher of the Year.

"Jennifer is an outstanding teacher who has a remarkable quality to infuse creativity and fun into the learning process," said Chadwick. She extends herself to the students at John Bidwell School as well as her professional colleagues."

Eighth grade teacher Michael Holt believes that children enter the world with a sense of wonder, but says that wondrous sense of possibility and play can fade all too soon as students enter the upper grades.

"As a teacher of language arts and history, reading and writing loom large in my life and the lives of my students," said Holt. "Some of my pupils have difficulty with basic conventions of written English. Others write with rare authority over their prose. Whichever the case, they live in need of guidance."

Holt explained that students need guidance and an emotionally involved experience that encourages them to develop their skills. "I provide that experience," he stated.

For his gifted students, those experiences include producing a Shakespearean play, hosting and participating in speech and debate competitions and performing at elementary schools to recruit students and win support for the arts. They also journey to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

"Along the way, they push themselves to experiment with words, to choose the right quote, and to struggle with difficult texts because the reality of what they do empowers their writing about it," he added.



Holt knows how the value of his students' experiences is reflected in their work. "Writing an essay about the characters in 'Midsummer Night's Dream' cannot be boring when one has played Lysander, Hermia, Puck or Oberon in an actual performance after hours of rehearsals," he stated.

He feels remedial students need an emotional connection to restore their sense of wonder and to give them power to shore up their ability to read, think and write. "I do this by teaching poetic devices through hip-hop examples or to confront head-on their perception of their neighborhoods in their descriptive essays."

Holt matches remedial block students with gifted students and includes them on the trips to Oregon so they also experience the Shakespearean festival.

"I tutor them after school.

"They learn. They write essays and poems. As proud as I am of the success of my GATE students, it is the students from block class who become involved that most reward my teaching," said Holt.

His principal at California Middle School, Elizabeth Vigil, said that Holt is the ultimate professional in all his endeavors and has the respect of staff and the entire school community.

"At a time when teachers are asked to go above and beyond to bring students to a new level of achievement, he exemplifies a selfless commitment to excellence in instruction and provides students with activities that maximize their potential for growth," Vigil added.

The two Teachers of the Year are now candidates for the countywide Teacher of the Year Program. The Sacramento County Teachers of the Year will be announced at a banquet on Sept. 7.

Both teachers are eagerly anticipating enjoying guests-of honor status at a Sacramento Kings game next spring. Winners from all the districts will have dinner at the arena prior to the game. During halftime, the teachers will be introduced to spectators from center court.