

Dept. of Public Instruction: Five educators selected 2024 Wisconsin Teachers of the Year

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MADISON — The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction announced today that five educators from across the state have been named 2024 Wisconsin Teachers of the Year. The group received the honor for their dedication to the education profession and for the impact they have on their students as learners and individuals. The group was notified of their selection at separate, surprise ceremonies at their respective schools throughout the last two weeks.

“It has been an honor to travel across Wisconsin and celebrate these teachers,” State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly said. “They exemplify what makes the teaching profession so rewarding and so impactful by engaging students in creative ways, creating inclusive classroom and school communities, and serving as leaders in their schools and beyond. The enthusiasm we saw from the students really shows the great work these teachers are doing, and I know that great work is happening in schools all over our state. Let me say a huge thank you to all our Wisconsin teachers! You make a difference every day, and we are grateful.”

The 2024 Wisconsin Teachers of the Year are:

- **Saghar Homayounpour**, computer science teacher at New Berlin West High School (School District of New Berlin)
- **Claudia Heller de Messer**, an English as a second language teacher at Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts (Milwaukee Public Schools)
- **Rachel Kumferman**, school social worker at McKinley Elementary School (Wauwatosa School District)
- **Katelyn Winkel-Simmerman**, mathematics teacher at Cedar Grove-Belgium

Middle School (Cedar Grove-Belgium School District)

- **Brian Collins**, biology teacher at Unity High School (Unity School District)

The Teachers of the Year will interview with a committee that will select one of the five to represent Wisconsin in the National Teacher of the Year program. That individual will receive an additional \$6,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation. More information on the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year Program [can be found on the DPI's website](#).

Additional background information on each 2024 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year is below.

Saghar Homayounpour, computer science teacher, New Berlin West High School (School District of New Berlin)

Originally from Iran, Saghar emigrated to the United States and then to Canada in 2011 before returning to the U.S. in 2015 and starting her position as a computer science teacher at New Berlin West. Saghar has earned many accolades as a teacher, some of which include the successes of her CyberPatriot Club, which she started in 2018 with students earning consistent top placings at the state level. She is also a mentor teacher, supporting novice computer science teachers with one-on-one support as they begin their teaching experience and is a selected reader for AP Computer Science Principles exams annually.

Claudia Heller de Messer, an English as a second language teacher at Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts (Milwaukee Public Schools)

Heller de Messer, originally from Colombia, has been a teacher at MPS since 1997, serving students and the district at Milwaukee Spanish Immersion School, Tippecanoe School for the Arts, Hayes Bilingual School, and Parkside over the past six years. In her current role as an ESL specialist at Parkside, Heller de Messer works with 110 English learners who altogether speak 19 languages, supporting and advocating for them and their families, many who are recent refugees and immigrants to the United States. Colleagues and students credit her for her success in helping students and families navigate the systems of a new country.

Rachel Kumferman, school social worker at McKinley Elementary School (Wauwatosa School District)

Kumferman has worked for the Wauwatosa School District for 21 years, at Lincoln and McKinley Elementary Schools, and has served as the district homeless liaison since 2011. Although her training and background is in school social work, she is also a counselor, crisis team member, Wauwatosa School District McKinney-Vento coordinator, equity team member, PBIS Tier Two coach, and more

Katelyn Winkel-Simmerman, mathematics teacher at Cedar Grove-Belgium Middle School (Cedar Grove-Belgium School District)

Winkel-Simmerman has taught math at the school for over six years. By building relationships with students, she successfully finds innovative ways to reach and teach all students and help them learn and grow as individuals. As the advisor for the school's Student Council and a variety of committees, she works with students to plan events and provide meaningful opportunities beyond the classroom, which have a positive effect on the school and community. Winkel-Simmerman takes part in various professional development opportunities.

Brian Collins, biology teacher at Unity High School (Unity School District)

Collins has taught general biology, AP biology, environmental biology, human anatomy/physiology, ecology, zoology, and ornithology at Unity for about 22 years. He has used the school forest for research and innovative learning opportunities, and even has his own collection of "birds on a stick" in his classroom. Collins has coached football and powerlifting at the schools, has been a participant of Unity's Ojibwe Language Revitalization Club, and has chaired the Professional Staff Development Committee. He continues his passion for birds and photography every summer as a contract biologist working all over Wisconsin for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which he shares in his classroom.