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WGVU's COOL TEACHER



by Ben Mannes

The WGVU Cool Teacher program offers a chance to spotlight outstanding teachers in the West Michigan area. The program was created in conjunction with the College of Education and is in its 13th year. Students in grades K - 8 write letters explaining why their teacher is a “cool” teacher and submit them to WGVU Cool Teacher for review. The letters are reviewed by a panel of judges that consists of members of WGVU and the College of Education at Grand Valley State University. The program continues to grow each year with up to 100 letters being received each month. Three winners are selected based on their unique portrayal of the outstanding attributes their teachers possess. Last year there were 21 winners, as the contest runs for 7 months during the school year. The program provides recognition for teachers who might not otherwise receive it, at least not in the form of winning an award. Winning teachers and the students who nominate them are featured on WGVU TV and on wgvu.org, in addition to a pizza party that is provided for the winning teacher and nominating student’s class. As a special treat, Cool teachers and the students who nominate them also receive an Amtrak train ride to Chicago for their families. At the end of the school year, all winning teachers are invited to attend a banquet to honor their recognition.

A program such as Cool Teacher is extremely important considering the current school climate. With pressures on schools related to accountability and high-stakes testing, teachers are working harder than ever to ensure they are meeting content expectations, while balancing and maintaining a positive learning experience for their students. Teaching is often a thankless profession, and if nothing else, recognition of this type can help to recharge a teacher’s energy for continuing success in the classroom. 🍎

Illustration by Ashley Hankamp