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Colleagues

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ARMSTRONG RECEIVES HONOR

Dorothy C. Armstrong, Ph.D., professor in Advanced Studies in Education, has been selected by the Deans' Council at GVSU to receive the Distinguished Faculty Award presented annually by the Michigan Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities. The state's top educators will be recognized for their achievements at Michigan State University's Kellogg Center in April.

"Dorothy is someone certainly deserving of this honor," GVSU President Arend D. Lubbers said. "She continues to be looked upon by people at the university and people in her field as an outstanding professor."



Dorothy Armstrong

Armstrong is the second member from the School of Education to receive the Distinguished Faculty Award. Dr. Faite Mack was recognized in 1986.

"It's an incredible honor," Armstrong said. "I've been an educator for more than 30 years and this is a culmination of a career in which each step has been rewarding."

"I see myself as representing my School of Education colleagues who make similar efforts. It is a representation of the work all of us do."

Among the many programs Armstrong has assisted in developing and facilitating are the Focus On Ability summer program for gifted and talented students and the Graduate Teacher Certification curriculum.

Armstrong has been affiliated with GVSU since 1980 and was Director of International Studies from 1985-88 before joining the School of Education. In 1994, Armstrong received the Outstanding Educator Award from GVSU.

ENROLLMENT NUMBERS RISE

Teacher Education numbers at GVSU are up 12.8 percent with 380 students and 386 field placements in the Fall semester and 440 students and 516 field placements during the current semester. Since 1990, graduate enrollment has increased by almost 40 percent.

University enrollment is at an all-time high with nearly 15,000 students attending classes during the 1997-98 academic year.

WE'RE MOVING TO MACKINAC

The School of Education is moving the Teacher Education program and all administrative offices from Au Sable Hall to a newly constructed wing of Mackinac Hall for the start of the 1998 Fall Semester. The move will provide the School of Education with additional classrooms and increased faculty office space.

ON THE COVER: Dr. Frank Sebastian, left, and Charles Sturtevant are colleagues in education. Sturtevant is Facilitator of Secondary Education for Grand Rapids Public Schools and Sebastian is the principal at Creston High School. Elementary school teacher Bridget Reiths is actively involved with Project WILD lessons.

ROBERT HAGERTY DEAN'S CORNER



REDUCING SCHOOL SIZE WILL RAISE LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Contrary to popular opinion, smaller is better when it comes to educating students.

Americans have for decades prided themselves on their large comprehensive schools. The myth "Bigger is better" has been perpetuated by educational leaders and school boards. The public was led to believe that a "better" school was bigger, because it supposedly provided a more diverse curriculum and more instructional specialists and student service options.

Compelling evidence over two decades, however, demonstrates that large schools are not as efficient as their smaller counterparts, particularly for the most vulnerable kids.

Studies have shown that school size has more influence on student achievement than any other factor controllable by educators. Students from smaller schools significantly out-perform those in large schools on standardized tests of basic skills. Smaller-school students are more likely than those in larger schools to pass major subjects and progress toward graduation. National studies confirm that youngsters learn more in reading, math, science and history in small schools than in large ones.

As far back as the 1970s, researchers found that lower-achieving students performed better in small schools.

Smaller schools can become the focal point for regenerating communities and encouraging more parental support.

Weighing Dollars With Sense

Taxpayers are led to believe that large schools are more economical. Breaking up a 2,000 student high school into four separate schools, critics contend, is too expensive and reduces the available resources for each school, but the long-term educational, psychological and social costs and ramifications of failing to do so have never been estimated.

What community has determined how much large schools may have contributed to its misedu-

cated and disenfranchised students' drug, unemployment, welfare and prison costs some five, 10 or 15 years after dropping out, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally? The expense of improved urban school buildings pales in comparison to the \$1.4 billion spent each year to maintain the state prison system.

Once elementary school populations reach 300 students and middle or high schools exceed 600, the climate begins to get impersonal and bureaucratic. Teachers don't know other teachers or students like their counterparts in smaller schools. They don't talk as frequently about individual students or about curricular issues in faculty meetings.

Students in large schools see their friends less frequently in extracurricular activities — including athletics — and have much less opportunity to hold leadership positions. Parents do not visit the school as frequently or know their child's teachers.

First and foremost, urban school facilities — which are unsafe, unhealthy and inadequate in terms of having structural flaws, heating, electrical and asbestos problems — need to be updated to meet current health, safety and fire codes. These costs are significant, but improved facilities represent an investment in the future of our cities and our children.

State legislators could, and should, provide incentive grants and low-interest loans to any district — especially poor ones — to recreate more humanely sized schools or design smaller school units within large school facilities.

And while financial support is needed to upgrade outdated physical infrastructures of the buildings, the main resource needed to create smaller, more efficient learning communities within those walls is innovative thinking and collaboration among educational leaders.

By reducing the size of our schools, big, big things can happen for our students.

Robert Hagerty, Ed.D. is in his second year as

Conference Serves Dual Purpose

A recent conference hosted by faculty and students was aimed at preparing first-year teachers to better serve as classroom mentors while providing the School of Education with a detailed critique of its curriculum.

Grants provided by the Center For Philanthropy And Nonprofit Leadership and the Teaching and Learning Center enabled the School of Education to dissect critical classroom issues at its first Mentoring Conference in the Fall of 1997. The workshop reunited recent graduates with current education students.

Participants were asked to reflect on the dif-

ferent aspects — pro and con — of the School of Education program. Focus groups discussed mentoring and collaboration, special education issues and laws, classroom management and instruction, multi-age classroom strategies, middle school practices, diversity and graduate educational opportunities.

Facilitators for the conference included SOE professors Linda McCrea, Joe Fisher, Patsy Fox, Loretta Konecki, Sandra Miller, Barbara Reinken, Liz Storey and Connie Widdis and Grand Haven Public Schools instructor Barb Sepura.