



P R E S S R E L E A S E

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BCIU TO ANNOUNCE WINNER OF 2008 ANNIE SULLIVAN AWARD

Prestigious award honors local educators for their outstanding service

Reading, PA – The Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) will honor the nominees and winner of the 2008 Annie Sullivan Award at a reception and award ceremony on Thursday, April 3, 2008. The ceremony will take place at 5 p.m. in Room 111ABC at the BCIU. Colleagues, friends, and family will gather to recognize the outstanding service and dedication of these individuals to the advocacy and well-being of students with disabilities.

The nominees for this year's award are:

Michele Bleacher, Antietam School District
Tara C. Lutz, Conrad Weiser Area School District
Sherry Miller, Hamburg Area School District
Tammy Torres, Wilson School District

The Annie Sullivan Award is given in recognition of an individual who has worked to encourage the understanding and promotion of students with disabilities in his or her school or community. Annie Sullivan was Helen Keller's devoted teacher and mentor who was nearly blind herself. After treatment, she regained her sight and committed herself to teaching the blind and deaf. This year marks the 22nd annual presentation of the award in Berks County. For more information on this event, contact Janette Weaver at 610-987-8511.

Below are the biographies of this year's nominees.

NOMINEES BIO

Michele Bleacher, Assistant Principal, Mt. Penn Elementary

- Demonstrates exemplary leadership for all students, especially special needs students.
- Creatively works with students using innovative techniques to support their individual needs.
- Actively involved in the Instructional Support Team process and regularly reviews data and input from various sources to assist the students.
- Engages parents and community members to continuously educate them about individual students and their special needs.
- Secured additional supports for teachers, curriculum materials, and adaptive equipment.
- Described as an outstanding education leader

Tara C. Lutz, Learning Support Teacher, Conrad Weiser Area Middle School

- When her learning support teaching colleague took an unexpected medical leave, Tara quickly assumed additional responsibilities.
- Assumed responsibility of her colleague's students in addition to her own students and mentored the substitute teacher who was new to special education.
- Wrote Individual Education Programs (IEP) and held IEP conferences.
- Fielded parent calls, addressed concerns, and set up meetings.
- Intervened with the general education staff to address student concerns.
- Her initiative and leadership made it possible for the school district to continue to provide eighth grade learning support students with educational programs appropriate for their needs.

Sherry Miller, Paraprofessional in Life Skills Classroom, Hamburg Area Middle School

- Perry Elementary teacher Regina Beretsky considers Sherry, an emotional support aide, her "right hand woman" in the classroom.
- Was the first to volunteer as a paraprofessional when a new Life Skills class began at Hamburg Middle School.
- Very involved in the creation of the Life Skills class and diligently learned the needs of the multi-handicapped students.
- Humble, deflects credit or any recognition.
- Analyzes what needs to be done, takes on the challenge, and gives 200%.
- Created interactive bulletin boards, developed schedules and homemade manipulatives for the students.
- She and a colleague work very closely with a student with serious behavioral difficulties, striving to create and follow a routine for him. Has been consistent and determined in helping him and has shown initiative, enthusiasm, and determination while remaining positive even on the most trying days.
- Volunteered to attend a sleepover at the school so that three special needs students could attend the event.
- Possesses a "can do" attitude with students.

Tammy Torres, Parent, Wilson School District

- Mother of two students (a daughter, Alex, and son, Brendan) with disabilities at Cornwall Terrace Elementary School.

- Tireless advocate and a source of support and knowledge in her quest to help her children fulfill their potential.
- Has made it her life's work to explore and acquire all the information she can to help and support children with special needs.
- Volunteers her time to school and fundraising.
- Shares information regarding ways to support children in the Least Restrictive Environment. This communication helped develop a trusting bond between home and school, greatly attributing to the success of her children in both academic and non-academic settings.
- Looks for ways to help within the school setting that were outside of her own child's classroom. Assists in classrooms as a computer lab assistant.
- Active fundraiser and organizer for Autism Awareness. Organized efforts to raise funds for school district's Special Education department as well as Alex's Lemonade Stand and Autism Education.