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Media Release

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Teachers of the Year Recognized at Salina Public Schools Board Meeting

Kelsey Wood, special education teacher at Cottonwood Elementary School, and Michael Hall, math teacher at Central High School, were recognized as USD 305 Teachers of the Year. The Salina Board of Education honored them at their regular meeting on March 5, 2024.

Elementary Teacher of the Year: Kelsey Wood, special education teacher at Cottonwood Elementary School



Kelsey Wood has been teaching students at Cottonwood Elementary for six years. She taught kindergarten for over three years and then transitioned to the position of interventionist who provided reading and writing support. After earning her masters in special education, she began teaching special education to students in kindergarten through fifth grades.

While many commend her for her contributions as a special education teacher, it's Kelsey's labor of love, advocacy and her innate ability to foster inclusion that sets her apart. She explains, "Students are most successful when they have positive relationships in loving environments where their mental health is a priority."

Kelsey's classroom is where every student's developmental, behavioral and academic needs are met and embraced. She transforms the curriculum to ensure each child's pathway to learning is as uniquely compelling as their needs. Her steadfast approach to implementing behavioral plans is masterful.

Kelsey's influence reaches beyond her classroom walls at Cottonwood. Her voice on the Cottonwood Belonging Committee helps ensure everyone within the school's ecosystem—students, families, and staff—is seen, heard, and valued. Initiatives like Family University and the Kids Council are additional examples of Cottonwood's culture of belonging and kindness.

Kelsey extends her nurturing spirit to fellow educators as a Mentor Teacher, guiding first-year teachers with patience and wisdom. Within the community, her presence is far reaching as she is often spotted at extracurricular activities. Her engagement with Cottonwood families is grounded in genuine respect and kindness.

Her accolades, including recognitions from Kansas Wesleyan University and the Horizon Award after just her first year of teaching, are testaments to Kelsey's dedication to exceeding expectations.

Kelsey Wood's impact as an educator, advocate and community builder will shape the lives of many for years to come.

Secondary Teacher of the Year: Michael Hall, math teacher at Central High School



When the name Michael Hall is mentioned among the students and staff of Central High School, it's often met with nods of respect and fond smiles.

Michael, who teaches a variety of math classes, has a knack for easing the anxiety often associated with mathematics. His classroom is where figures and formulas become accessible and relevant. By integrating real-world examples, Michael demonstrates the use of math in everyday life, disproving the myth that mathematics resides only in textbooks.

But it's not just his innovative teaching methods that have earned him this award, Michael's commitment to his students is exceptional. He develops individual relationships and fosters an environment where mathematics discussion is not a source of fear, but a starting point for growth.

Michael's philosophy is built on the principle of high expectations. And, those he sets for himself are even higher than those for his students. "If you raise the level of expectation, you will raise the outcome," states Michael, who misses a day only in the case of an emergency. He believes that teaching isn't just a job; it's a responsibility—a duty to fill every second of class with value. His students relate to his effort and productivity and are inspired to match his commitment with their own hard work.

For Michael, teaching is more than delivering knowledge, it's about building character. He shares, "Through helping students with difficult concepts, they can understand that it's okay to struggle and it's important to be able to work at things." Students gain confidence and a sense of accomplishment in his class.

Michael Hall's legacy extends well beyond the reaches of numbers and equations, it lies in the hearts and minds of his students.

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