



River Trails

SCHOOL DISTRICT 26

Recognition and Thanks
- To our Amazing Staff -
Those Who Excel Nominees
March, 2025



Since 1970, the Illinois State Board of Education has sponsored the Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year program to honor educators who have made significant contributions to our state's public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools. Awards are presented in **seven categories**: classroom teachers, early career educators (teachers 1-4 years), school administrators, student support personnel, educational service personnel, community volunteers, and teams. Application materials are evaluated by a selection committee composed of individuals who represent a variety of educational organizations. All awardees are honored at an annual banquet in the Spring.

Our Process

- **Early September:** Building Principals Recommend Nominees to Cabinet (There were 11 Recommendations)
- **October:** Cabinet Selects Final Nominees for Application Process (Narrowed to these 4 Groups)
- **November:** Application Components and Party Responsible
 - **Section 1: Applicant Info- Nominee**
 - **Section 2: Professional Biography - Principal**
 - **Section 3: Resume- Nominee****
 - **Section 4: Letters of Recommendation- Principal help nominee Coordinate**
 - **Section 5: Essay Response- Nominee**
- **December:** Wait....

Our Process

- **January:** Wait...
- **February:** Winners Announced
- **May:** Celebration Banquet in Bloomington-Normal

*Here are the outstanding nominees from
District 26.....*

Prairie Trails

Marisol Gallegos, Custodian



Prairie Trails

Marisol Gallegos, Custodian

Marisol is truly a gem at Prairie Trails School. Her unwavering dedication ensures that every corner of our school is not only clean and safe but also welcoming to students, staff, and visitors alike. Her exceptional work ethic shines through in everything she does, and her meticulous attention to detail is evident in the environment she helps maintain. Beyond her technical skills, Marisol brings a genuine sense of pride to her work, making our school a place where everyone feels valued and cared for. Her contributions are a cornerstone of the positive atmosphere we all enjoy at Prairie Trails.



Euclid Elementary

Martha Atanus, Jen Ceisel, Margaret Muscarello, Kristin Zavala,
Multilingual Team



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Euclid Elementary

**Martha Atanus, Jen Ceisel, Margaret Muscarello, Kristin Zavala,
Multilingual Team**

Euclid's Multilingual team members work seamlessly across three different teams: their own team, their grade-level teaching team, and a 5th-grade partner teacher. With a relentless commitment to meeting the needs of their ML students, they use data to plan small group lessons, co-plan co-taught lessons, consult with partner teachers, and collaborate to address the unique challenges faced by individual learners—particularly the growing number of newcomers. Their hard work paid off last school year, with 31% of our ML students exiting the program on ACCESS, compared to the district's exit rate of 18%. We are deeply grateful for their leadership, expertise, and collaboration.



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Indian Grove Elementary

Filomena Kulesza, Stacy Alexakos: Intervention Team



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Indian Grove Elementary

Filomena Kulesza, Stacy Alexakos: Intervention Team

Stacy and Filomena are incredibly hardworking, adaptable, and collaborative professionals who have made a profound impact on our school community. Over the past four years, they have transformed the RtI process, ensuring it is more effective and student-centered than ever. Their dedication, both in the classroom and in their own specialized setting, has been instrumental in consistently meeting our goal of reducing the number of students performing at or below the 35th percentile in reading and math each year. Beyond their direct work with students, Stacy and Filomena enrich the school culture by planning, organizing, and executing our annual Family Literacy Night, a treasured event that brings families together and fosters a love of learning. Their relentless commitment to both academic achievement and community building makes them invaluable members of our team.



River Trails Middle School

Noel Rajski, Learning Behavior Specialist



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River Trails Middle School

Noel Rajski, Learning Behavior Specialist

Noel consistently goes above and beyond to ensure her students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. She expertly tailors her teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of each student, creating an inclusive and nurturing environment where all learners can excel. Noel's exceptional patience, boundless creativity, and unwavering commitment to her students' growth not only inspire those in her classroom but also motivate her colleagues. Her dedication to fostering confidence and independence in students with diverse learning challenges reflects her deep passion for making a lasting, transformative impact. Noel's approach goes far beyond instruction—it is a testament to her relentless drive to empower students and elevate the entire learning community.



YOU ARE AN INVALUABLE PART OF OUR
SCHOOL DISTRICT FAMILY.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!



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