

Ardmore teacher focuses on whole child

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Golden Apple nominee Mia Bohlin is an English language learning teacher at Ardmore Elementary School in Villa Park, and teaches English to parents after school.

Daniel White | Staff Photographer

Mia Bohlin may be an English language learning teacher, but she teaches students at Ardmore Elementary about the world.

While Bohlin works directly with approximately 50 students at the Villa Park school who speak languages ranging from Spanish to Polish and Greek to Chinese, she has spearheaded many initiatives that benefit all students.

"Mia is a person who does not understand the term moderation. She goes all out for her students," Ardmore Principal Michele Cummins said.

In a letter to the Golden Apple Foundation, Cummins wrote: "If a student can't add coins, tell time, measure, read two-syllable words, understand prepositions, Mia gets involved. This is beyond the responsibilities of a literacy-based ELL program! But to be committed to the whole child is the essence of Mia - not what would make her life easier, but what is in the best interest of children."

In just three years at Ardmore, Bohlin, of Downers Grove, has initiated a multicultural awareness program, started a multicultural student club, begun teaching parents of students after school one day a week, written and received more than six grants and started a multicultural fair.

A teacher since 1990, Bohlin earned a degree in modern languages, with an emphasis on Spanish, and a minor in secondary education from Wheaton College and became certified in elementary education. She also received her masters in ELL and bilingual instructional leadership.

Bohlin's position as an English language learning teacher is unique in that she works with every teacher in the building to benefit students who need help acquiring the English they need to become successful in their classrooms.

Since she started the school's multicultural awareness program, students learn about a new country and language each month. They learn to say "hello," "goodbye," "thank you" and "you're welcome," and students use the words during morning announcements each day.

"It makes the students who speak that language very proud that the whole school would celebrate it," Bohlin said.

"It helps them feel comfortable in the school. It helps students be excited about it and respect that heritage. It's really about developing respect for each other's ethnicity."

When Bohlin organized the multicultural student club, she had so many children sign up that she required they submit an essay to participate. Then, so many kids followed through with the essay that they had to break it into two groups.

"You just don't get that very often - so many kids that they have to write an essay," Cummins said. "They know if they're involved that she'll take them seriously."

This year's second annual multicultural fair is expected to be even more wildly popular than last year, Cummins said. Students have passports and travel from "country to country" learning about the different heritages and earning a passport stamp at each one.

Bohlin also earned a Key Contributor award at the school this year. She attributes her success as a teacher to her family and influences from her mother, who was a teacher for 40 years in the Chicago Public School system, as well as her strong religious beliefs.

"I love kids, and I love seeing them learn," Bohlin said. "Seeing kids get excited about learning and doing it in both languages is very exciting."