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Philanthropy style teaching earns South Australian educator a national award

A Salisbury High School teacher dedicated to connecting student learning with the real world will receive a national award in the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) today at a ceremony in Melbourne.

Humanities co-ordinator Evan Polymeneas will join 11 other outstanding educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards. Selected from more than 1000 nominations in 2014, the 12 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching.

Mr Polymeneas has been teaching history and geography at Salisbury High School for 10 years. He was nominated by the school council and will receive an ASG NEiTA Leadership and Development Award. This award is for achieving outstanding learning outcomes for students and showing outstanding leadership qualities as a teacher.

ASG NEiTA Chairman, Allen Blewitt says Mr Polymeneas' dedication and initiative is a true reflection of what NEiTA celebrates.

"As a professional in the education sector, I understand just how committed teachers like Mr Polymeneas are to their profession. Not only has Mr Polymeneas excelled as a teacher but he has also contributed to teacher quality through his mentoring role at the University of South Australia, teaching first and final year graduates about the value of classroom relationships and the value of conceptual modelling.

"This sort of approach adds to the quality of education that children can access in schools and is a credit to the value-add our ASG NEiTA teachers bring to education."

Mr Polymeneas is passionate about helping students to grow into critical and innovative thinkers and says he encourages students to take ownership of their own learning.

"I aspire to help students understand and engage in their world and value their community, as well as becoming agents of positive change. I focus on creative lesson planning and linking curriculum back to the real world."

In the last three years Mr Polymeneas developed the 'Walk for Water' community project, which is now part of the year 8 care and citizenship program. Inspired by the documentary 'Barefoot in Ethiopia' the program merges the ideas of water, health and philanthropy, teaching students about the role of water in normal body function to the role of water in third world development in Africa. The students also fundraise to purchase water carts and develop water programs in the remote village of Euryn in northern Ethiopia.

"I felt our students should see that philanthropy is not the bastion of privileged individuals and communities. The approach is a one of head, heart and hand. Learn about an issue, develop empathy and then be an active agent of change," said Mr Polymeneas.

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated these inspirational recipients.

Chief Executive Officer of ASG NEiTA, John Velegrinis, says he is humbled by the teaching calibre and the depth of experience of the award recipients.

"I congratulate Mr Polymeneas and the other NEiTA recipients. Their dedication, leadership and initiative is a true reflection of what NEiTA represents, celebrating quality educators in Australia. There is compelling evidence linking teacher quality to student achievement, and accomplished teachers demonstrate inspiration and enthusiasm for teaching and student learning. This is why NEiTA has thrived for the last 21 years, because the community thinks these teachers deserve recognition.

"All of our national award recipients are passionate about the need for greater quality pre-service teaching programs, and they are teachers who also continually strive to better themselves, pushing the status quo and learning and adapting with their students."

The national awards are divided into three categories: leadership and development, innovation and community engagement. For more information on the 12 national awardees, including profiles go to: <http://www.asg.com.au/neita>

Eleven national award recipients will receive \$5000 professional development grants with one teacher getting the incredible opportunity to go to Space Camp in the U.S. One teacher is also awarded a \$2000 Disability Inclusion Grant.

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