

Friday 10 March 2017

NSW teachers win national awards

Three New South Wales teachers will receive national awards at the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) today at a ceremony in Melbourne.

John Williams from Wheeler Heights Public School (Collaroy Plateau), Keith Fennel from Airds High School and Jim Christodouloupoulos from Mittagong Public School will join 10 other outstanding educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards.

Selected from more than 1350 nominations in 2016, the 13 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching.

Early childhood teacher and assistant principal Mr Williams whose greatest strength is building strong relationships was nominated by a parent for an ASG NEiTA Leadership and Community Engagement Award.

Educating children in all stages of primary education throughout his 15 year career, Mr Williams has identified three 'significant truths' which underpin his daily teaching practices. His core beliefs are developing and supporting quality teachers to positively influence student engagement and outcomes, establishing genuine relationships and equipping students with skills to ensure they become successful learners and creative individuals in an era of rapid change and development.

ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt says Mr Williams' commitment through his hands-on and visible approach is appreciated by his students and community members.

"I congratulate Mr Williams for his efforts in fostering education which has been far reaching. As an active classroom teacher and school leader, he has been able break down barriers and establish genuine relationships by greeting students and parents each afternoon at the school gate and participating in extracurricular school activities. By building an open and trusting relationship with parents, they feel comfortable enough to directly ask questions, raise concerns and have confidence that their child's welfare is important."

Keith Fennel from Airds High School, a former SAS Soldier will receive an ASG NEiTA Early Career Teacher award. He quickly established himself as a vital staff member and built an excellent rapport with students seeing significant shifts in their behaviour, school attendance and participation in their learning.

Mr Fennell's primary aim as an educator is to create special educational opportunities for disengaged students to enable them to create a life that is not dictated by their current socioeconomic status.



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In just two years of teaching Mr Fennell has encouraged his students to set high personal expectations and to be positively motivated by their peers, allowed students to shape their own learning and from a wellbeing perspective, encouraged emotionally disengaged students to communicate their concerns.

Mr Blewitt says Mr Fennell's ability to connect with his students, allows them to work with passion and creates a comfortable and safe school environment where there's no judgement.

"Students will connect with teachers whom they believe are genuinely there to assist or empower them, and Mr Fennell has been able to reduce truancy levels of his students by engaging with them, understanding their needs and respecting their space. Mr Fennell has been able to strike a real cord with his students by also weaving his life outside of school into the classroom in a positive and instructive way. He shares stories of his former military service and translates the emotion and personal feelings into poetry, allowing his students to develop empathy by learning how to understand the feelings of others and became skilful poets."

Jim Christodoulopoulos from Mittagong Public School will receive an ASG NEiTA Community Engagement award and was nominated by a parent for taking his role as an educator very seriously and for always encouraging his students to embrace and love their learning.

Inclusiveness is an important life lesson that drives his teaching, after Mr Christodoulopoulos struggled to fit into school himself. Growing up in rural New South Wales in the 70s, he remembers being the only child from a different cultural background, his name 'mocked' and appearance, 'barely tolerated'.

That was until a new male teacher came to the school. He took an interest in his culture and incorporated his Greek background into his teaching. Mr Christodoulopoulos reminisces how he felt a 'sense of belonging,' and being valued. Now, success with students who were branded problematic or unteachable has meant that over years Mr Christodoulopoulos has had an influx of parents requesting their child be placed in his classroom.

Mr Blewitt says Mr Christodoulopoulos has harnessed his early experiences of ethnic discrimination to ensure all students feel they are part of the school environment and are supported to achieve.

"I applaud Mr Christodoulopoulos' resilience and commitment to learning more about his students' background and interests and incorporating these passions into his classes. For example, he had an Indigenous student with behavioural problems in his class and after failed attempts of designing individual lesson plans to include him, Mr Christodoulopoulos reached out to his family for support. Revelations of his fear of abandonment and his love of Angry Birds, allowed Mr Christodoulopoulos to create an authentic learning environment where the young boy could engage in all the learning activities and thrive socially and academically with an Angry Birds toy close by."



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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 the ASG NEiTA recipients have all been recognised by their local communities for making a genuine difference to education and for supporting the educational aspirations families have for their children.

"I congratulate Mr Williams, Mr Fennell and Mr Christodoulopoulos along with the other ASG NEiTA recipients. These outstanding teachers and educators have earned the respect of their communities through their hard work, building trusting relationships and ensuring their love for education gets passed on to their students, creating a culture of lifelong learning."

Teachers have an enormous responsibility and our ASG NEiTA recipients take on this responsibility with humility, striving to always be accountable for their actions, working beyond what is expected of them and expecting nothing in return. Their joy comes from the challenge of ensuring their students flourish academically and socially, giving students choices and offering holistic solutions. This is why ASG NEiTA has thrived for the last 22 years. The community thanks and applauds you for your contribution to teaching the next generation of young Australians."

The national awards are divided into four categories: leadership and development, innovation, community engagement and introducing, early career teacher. For more information on the 13 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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For more information, please contact:

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Editor's notes:

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) is a member owned organisation, helping to create educational opportunities for children. ASG has been helping families and their children for more than 40 years. During this time, more than 530,000 children have been enrolled with ASG and more than \$2.5 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments returned to members.



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The ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) started in 1994 in Australia and 1996 in New Zealand. Since inception, more than 34,000 teachers have been nominated by the community in the two countries, with more than 1050 teachers receiving about \$940,000 in professional development grants, prizes and endowments.

For more information visit: www.asg.com.au



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