



Sarasota Classified Teachers Association

"An Independent Labor Union Dedicated to the Professional Well-being of ALL Sarasota County Schools Employees"

Sarasota teacher to be honored in California Wednesday as nation's best in special ed

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SAN DIEGO -- Helen Pastore, a 10-year veteran of Sarasota's Oak Park School, will be honored Wednesday (April 8) in San Diego as the nation's top special education teacher.

Pastore, a member of the Sarasota Classified Teachers Association (SCTA), will receive the 2015 Clarissa Hug Award from the 29,000-member, worldwide Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) at the group's annual conference.

"This really helps to put a national spotlight on Florida schools and how they work with students who have special needs," said Pastore, who teaches high school and adult students at Oak Park. "It's a great chance for us to highlight the innovative strategies we're using in our classrooms, and to highlight the opportunities we're creating for our students."

The Clarissa Hug Award is given annually to one teacher nationwide who "exemplifies the best in special education teaching." It is one of only five nationwide professional honors the CEC gives annually and is named after a Miami-area educator who paved the way for special education in the mid-21st-century.

Pastore's focus on integrating the arts and real-world business experiences are among the key qualities that earned her the award. She directly involves local businesses such as Sarasota's A Good Yarn, and collaborates with arts organizations including the Ringling School of Design and the Asolo Performing Arts Center.

Also named Florida's top special education teacher in 2013 by the state CEC, Pastore has earned praise from colleagues for going the extra mile for her students. "It's all about preparing students for life, and her work with her students is an inspiration to us all," said Pat Gardner, president of the SCTA. "Like so many of our Oak Park teachers, Helen never gives up."

Pastore credited Oak Park with creating an environment that encourages teachers to seek out ways to make education more meaningful to its students. "I'm not the only teacher that does these things, by a long shot," Pastore says. "In fact, I am one of many in a constellation – not only at Oak Park, but throughout the entire county."

Pastore, who has a master's degree in autism spectrum disorders and severe intellectual disabilities, will serve as the CEC's spokesperson before the media and federal legislators if needed throughout 2015.

The SCTA fights for high salaries and good working conditions for all of Sarasota County schools employees and provides ongoing professional support in the form of classes, workshops, coaching, training, and community development initiatives. Learn more at www.sctaonline.org or SCTA's Facebook page, titled "Sarasota Classified/Teachers Association." For more information on the Council for Exceptional Children, please see www.cec.sped.org.

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