

Outstanding Teaching Award

These days, Mary Robert stands apart from some pretty distinguished company.

Robert, a Radio Park Elementary second grade teacher, received the 2016 Penn State College of Education Alumni Society Outstanding Teaching Award — chosen from the many hundreds of graduates successfully teaching worldwide. She accepted the award at an Oct. 14 dinner.

“From a very young age, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher — and Penn State allowed me to make that childhood dream a reality,” she said at the event. “For the last 25 years, I have been blessed to touch the lives of many, many children who have shared one small part of their learning journey with me in my classroom. And they have each touched my life in special ways as well. I truly believe that there is no greater profession in the world than teaching. Every day, I have the opportunity to love and care for every child in my classroom.”



Her constant goal, she said, is to teach her children “to be lifelong learners and model that by being a lifelong learner myself.”

“I try to help them each reach their fullest potential by teaching them the importance of having a growth mindset and never giving up,” she said. “I teach them what it means to care for each other and accept and celebrate each other’s differences. And I teach them that they are never too young to make a difference in the world.”

Growing up in State College, Robert always knew she would attend Penn State to prepare for making a difference herself. As a teacher, she maintained a connection to her alma mater through the Professional Development School partnership between the College of Education and State College Area School District, which pairs student interns with teacher mentors for an entire school year. This year, Robert is mentoring her 15th intern.

Retired education professor and PDS founder Jim Nolan nominated her, having worked in her classroom as a program coordinator and then as a volunteer. Radio Park Principal Zac Wynkoop, district Director of Curriculum K-6 Deirdre Bauer and a former PDS intern, Amy Morton, provided letters of recommendation.

In addition to the College of Education and the PDS program, Robert thanked her district colleagues for their influence and her husband Ed and their two children, Matthew and Megan, for their support over the years. She noted the award “feels a bit like coming full circle” because her daughter, a Penn State junior, aspires to teach.

“Being a teacher and being a Penn Stater are such important parts of who I am, so to be honored for my teaching by Penn State was an incredible honor,” Robert said recently. “I didn’t go into teaching to win awards or to be recognized, but it was such a thrill.”

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