

Barbara Wiesmann

Barbara came to Fort Atkinson in the 2000-2001 school year, after teaching Special Education in the states of Texas and Indiana beginning in 1984. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater with a Bachelor of Science in Education in 1984.

Barbara teaches children with cognitive disabilities. She believes every child will learn the needed academic skills to grow to their full potential, along with the personal living skills, and social skills needed to become contributing members of his/her community. Her students' skills vary by subject, but they generally range from mid-kindergarten to 5th grade. She often has three or more levels of a skill or concept in one lesson. These lessons and assignments cover basic skills in math, reading, writing, science and social studies. Some of the skills taught are telling time, using money, basic math facts, reading

and following steps in a direction, writing sentences and paragraphs, and using maps.

Also part of the experience, are field trips where attending plays, going bowling, and visiting area businesses to explore work places are part of the curriculum that Barb teaches.

When asked how she works to raise student achievement and inspire students love for learning Barb notes that throughout the year she assesses student skills and she tailors lessons for each student's needs. Students also monitor their progress as well. This is very motivating to them to see how much they have improved! When students struggle or hit a challenging skill, she praises them for not giving up. Last year, she started giving "extra effort" tickets to students who stuck with a difficult task. The tickets could be used for computer time, free reading, or other activities. Using the "extra effort" tickets motivated her students to try harder which resulted in more success.

As for innovative projects, her students have worked with the Jefferson County Humane Society, in efforts that have benefited

animals. One sure project was making dog treats. They had to use the internet to find recipes for dog biscuits, travel to Sentry to buy the supplies, and read the directions to make the treats.

Another project was making a cat toy. This time they had an example of a hand made toy. They took it apart, made a pattern, and then cut fabric and assembled the toys with catnip in the center. Both projects were enjoyed by the students while they employed new skills or practiced previous learned skills.

Probably no teacher in the district has to differentiate their lessons and activities more than Barb to meet the diverse needs of her students. It truly takes hours and hours of planning each week, but Barb devotedly does what she must in meeting the needs of her students!

As for unrealized goals, Barb mentioned that two years ago a new 6th grader started middle school in her program. He was diagnosed as having an Autism spectrum disorder. After working with the district's Autism consultant and attending two conferences, she began implementing "low" tech and "mid" tech

visual supports such as small dry erase boards, calendars with daily schedules, and timers. While these low/mid tech supports have increased this 6th grader's participation and decreased his agitation. She hopes to explore the use of even higher tech supports. Her goal would be to receive further training using devices such as a video camera, iPad, SmartBoard, and Board Maker to enhance teaching of academic, social and communication skills.

When asked what the positive aspects are that she sees in education today, she notes that more teachers, from beginning teachers to seasoned teachers, are using technologies in their classroom to enhance their teaching. Nearly every teacher at the middle school is using netbooks and SmartBoards in their classrooms. Many others are using iPads and iPods.

Barb also mentions that our school promotes safe welcoming learning environments by bringing awareness and training to teachers and other staff on diversity and bullying.

Students are engaged in activities that promote respect for diversity and to recognize bullying and ways to stop it.

From a parent, “The transition from elementary to middle school for our daughter was made much easier due to Mrs. Wiesmann. She always found time to address our questions and concerns—that meant so much to us! The teaching methods that she used in the classroom were practical and varied and she always displayed a willingness to help her students excel and to achieve individual goals.”

From colleague, Kathy Brown-Kurtz, a counselor at the middle school, “I have worked in several school districts over the past thirty years and Barb is a special education teacher who stands out above the rest. While Barb’s classroom is highly focused on academic skills, she expertly weaves in functional skills. She is always on the lookout for new ideas and materials that she can use in her classroom.”

From her principal, Dr. Abbott, “Her tireless hours, thought, and care for her students inspires all of us!”

Ladies and gentlemen, with pleasure, we forwarded the nomination of Barbara Wiesmann for the Kohl Fellowship Award.