

LEADER AMONG US



Sarah Bergner, center, sits down with a Holyoke fifth grader to discuss a lesson during their fables unit.

DARCI RODRIGUEZ | THE HOLYOKE ENTERPRISE

Leading by example

BY DARCI RODRIGUEZ | THE HOLYOKE ENTERPRISE

Growing up in a family with a mom who worked as a librarian and a dad who was a professor, Sarah Bergner saw that her parents placed a high value on education. She was encouraged to ask questions, find answers and always challenge herself.

A few decades later, Bergner is the one who not only encourages her fifth and sixth grade students but also her peers at Holyoke Elementary School, and for that reason, she has been named the Leader Among Us for the 2022 Emerald Awards.

"Not only does Mrs. Bergner complete her normal planning, grading and assignments for her students, but she is also willing to take on the role of the Holyoke Elementary School Impact Coach and is a member of the Standards of Excellence Committee," said fifth grade teacher Theresa Tharp in her nomination letter for Bergner.

In her first year as the impact coach, Bergner is now in charge of visible learning for grades K-6. She explained that the goal is for students to take more ownership

of their work and to better understand what they're learning, why they're learning it and what to do next.

"She has attended additional trainings with our principal and has helped other teachers during her spare time implementing learning intentions, success criteria and helping teachers analyze different data reports," said Tharp. "In addition, in her drive to serve this position well, she takes time outside of school to learn more about her role as an instructional coach."

Tharp added that Bergner collaborates well with staff, and she encourages strategic thinking and personal development without being critical. "Without the help of Mrs. Bergner, the elementary staff would not have extra support for visible learning."

"I'm fortunate to work with a group dedicated to their students already," said Bergner. "They genuinely care about their kids."

"The question she asks herself is, 'How do we serve our teachers so they can serve students?'"

The role of a good coach is to know how to access resources and leverage the things that are going well in the school, she added, noting that everyone is willing to share ideas for improvement.

"We all have the same goals, and that's to be here for our kids," said Bergner.

Tharp said that as a member of the Standards of Excellence Committee, Bergner attends monthly meetings and represents her peers at the elementary school. She helps create and analyze surveys that are sent out to parents, teachers and students.

Bergner said that because it's a shared leadership model, "Our teachers have a huge amount of input."

She is in her fourth year of teaching in the district. She has a homeroom with sixth graders and teaches writing to grades 5-6. "I love their independence," she said of her students. "I get to help kids express themselves. I love helping them find their voice and form their own opinions."

Some of Bergner's instruction focuses on research skills and how to use online sources wisely. "They have the whole internet at their fingertips," she said, so it's about helping them find the information that's out there while practicing good digital citizenship.

She thought back to her first years of teaching more than a decade ago — the days of using overhead projec-

tors. Now, her classroom has its own Promethean Panel, which has an interactive touch-screen connected to the internet.

Bergner said that technology has helped students take more initiative in communicating with teachers and advocating for themselves.

Some of her favorite projects with students have included submitting poetry to contests, persuasive speeches about famous figures and a pen pal project with students from her previous school in Chicago, Illinois.

"Sarah takes initiative and is proactive in her teaching duties," said Tharp. "For example, if a student has an extended absence, she personally gathers materials and missing assignments which she delivers to their home. Not every teacher will make personal deliveries to their students."

Tharp added that Bergner performs her duties with integrity while also being extremely responsible and dependable.

Bergner truly is a leader among her peers and in her classroom.

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Sarah Bergner

"Without the help of Mrs. Bergner, the elementary staff would not have extra support for visible learning."

Theresa Tharp

SARAH BERGNER LEADER AMONG US

CURRENT POSITION: Sixth grade teacher.

HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE EDUCATION: High school: St. Thomas More Academy, Magnolia, Delaware. Undergrad: Bachelor of Arts in political science, University of Notre Dame. Grad school: Master of Science in education and social policy, Northwestern University.

PAST JOB EXPERIENCE: Saint Angela School, Chicago, Illinois, teaching fourth to eighth grade writing and history (nine years), Center for Talent Development at Northwestern leading summer camps focused on leadership and service (two summers).

FAMILY: Husband Landon, sons Theodore (age 4) and Oliver (age 1).

HOBBIES: Travel, camping, watercolor.

ROLE MODELS: My parents.

FAVORITE HOLYOKE SCHOOL MEMORIES: Hiking Arthur's Rock Trail with the sixth grade at their end-of-year class trip.

FAVORITE HOLYOKE MEMORIES: Family days at the pumpkin patch.

This award is open to any employee who provides excellent leadership. Leadership may come in many forms, such as many contributions to committees, mentoring, leading a group through a particular issue, speaking on behalf of others, finding a solution, advocating, inspiring or any form of leadership. The purpose of this award is to demonstrate that leadership comes at all levels.

Leader Among Us recipients 2010-2021:

- Lynn Schneider, third grade
- Kyle Stumpf, elementary principal
- Luke I. Thomas, JH/HS social studies
- Susan C. Ortner, JH/HS principal
- Angela N. Powell, HS English
- Laura Loutensock, elementary tech
- Heather Bieber, JH/HS English
- Yesenia Bencomo, elementary ESL
- Shauna Brown, JH/HS ag education
- Carly Daniel, 3-4 science
- Christy Shafer, K-3 ESL, paraprofessional
- Ashley Clayton, JH/HS counselor



Congratulations to the three Emerald Award recipients. We're proud of you!

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