

Simmons Elementary Principal Awarded Distinguished Principal Credential

The National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) awarded Karen Kanter, principal of Simmons Elementary School, with the Distinguished Principal credential. NISL's panel of experts selected Kanter and others who met the highest standard of professional experience, proven leadership success in relation to student achievement and a demonstrated capacity for strategic leadership.

"The entire district is thrilled for Karen on this well-deserved honor," said Dr. Monica J. Taylor, assistant superintendent of Hatboro-Horsham School District.

Kanter has been working toward this recognition since October 2016 when she was chosen to participate in a two-year grant program through the NISL Advanced Credentialing System (ACS) initiative. This initiative is funded by a multi-year, \$10.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education through its Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program. Using the grant, NISL partnered with districts in Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Mississippi, enrolling more than 1,100 principals who serve more than 700,000 students.

Under the SEED grant, Kanter worked with a principal coach Adam Schmucker from Quakertown Area School District and developed an action learning project focused on deeper learning in third, fourth and fifth grades. For example, the third grade project involved their social studies unit on landmarks and national parks. After learning about several landmarks and parks across the country, students were challenged to develop a marketing campaign for how they would attract visitors to their site. The projects required small groups of students to collaborate, think critically, communicate, and create.



Following the successful implementation of the new curriculum projects, Kanter was accepted into the final, portfolio phase in the 2018-2019 school year. For the distinguished principal portfolio, she partnered with Amber Molloy from the MCIU and a team of Simmons literacy specialists, as well as the fourth grade and fifth grade ELA teachers. They formed a professional learning community (PLC) focused on strengthening ELA instruction and assessment in the intermediate grades. They held monthly meetings and learned together using a "teacher as researcher" model where teachers implemented new strategies to improve learning and documented the results.

An expert panel from NISL in Washington, D.C. reviewed the portfolio and assessment data from Simmons Elementary School. On Dec. 18, 2019, three representatives from the panel visited Simmons to observe in classrooms and interview teachers from the PLC. Two days later, the panel reconvened in D.C. and voted to award Kanter the Distinguished Principal credential.

"Through this process, I have had the opportunity to strengthen my instructional leadership in the school community and I look forward to giving back by coaching and supporting aspiring and new principals in Pennsylvania," said Kanter.

As a Distinguished Principal, Kanter will become more involved in education at the state level by working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The ACS is in its early stages and Kanter will help shape the initiative for the future by developing high-quality professional learning for principals.

Editor's note: If you would like to schedule an interview with Karen Kanter, contact Communication Solutions at 215-884-6499.