



**Snohomish School District
Communications Office**

News Release

For more information, contact:

J. Marie Riche
Communications Specialist
(360) 563-7263 or (425) 238-7044
communicatio@sno.wednet.edu

For Immediate Release:

March 8, 2008

Snohomish Educator Wins Award

The Washington Association for Learning Alternatives (WALA) named June Shirey, Snohomish School District Director of Alternative Programs, their first “Administrator of the Year” at their State Spring Conference February 29 in Vancouver, Washington. Shirey, a long-time member of the organization, has served on the board for the last 4 years. Shirey was nominated for the “Secondary Educator of the Year” award, but WALA’s executive board created the new category.

In their letter to WALA, her staff stated Shirey is “a self starting exemplary alternative educator who has devoted the past twelve years...to ensuring every student has the opportunity to realize his or her potential and graduate from high school.” The nomination letter goes on to describe her as someone who works as hard for her teachers as she does for her students, and as much a friend as a supervisor.

“I don’t give up on anyone – and people know that about me,” says Shirey. “You have to believe in baby steps and not give up. People often say to me, ‘You must be so patient.’ But I am also impatient. You have to have expectations, you have to set goals with kids and help them follow through.”

Shirey has worked for the district 29 years. “I was hired straight out of graduate school to develop the resource room at Snohomish High School,” she reminisces. “It was a dream job.” She taught 15 years in the resource room and then became secondary specialist, developing special education programs and working with families of struggling students. She earned her administrative credential to oversee both special education and alternative education, but soon alternative education required her full-time attention.

Shirey’s early training was solid preparation for her current work. She grew up on the east coast, and earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology from Allegheny College, a small private school in Western Pennsylvania. “The school was big on internships and experiential learning. One of the best experiences was working one-on-one with a severely behavior-disordered boy through a hospital program and seeing his baby steps of progress.” That experience convinced Shirey that all students can be successful if given the right tools.

Her mom taught junior high, and her dad served on the school board while she was in high school. Seeing her parents’ successes and how psychology could be applied led her to an interest in teaching, and she completed a master’s program in special education. Then she married, moved to the west coast, and “got this wonderful job.”

Shirey feels her background in psychology is invaluable. “We have lots of kids with needs, and we work with family dynamics and the struggles kids have.” Becoming a parent,

going through her parents' divorce when she was in college, and her own divorce when her children were young, have also contributed to her ability to connect with people.

"Being a mom myself has been a good experience for my work with kids. It helped me think how I want kids to be treated and how to think from the parent's point of view." Her son Adam, 24, is a partner in a small real estate development company in Spokane, and Bryant, 22, is a senior at Western Washington University, studying marketing. Stepson Kelly, 31, is a musician. Shirey is pleased that all three are involved in things they love and feel passionate about.

As director of alternative programs, Shirey works directly with parents to find the right fit for their children. Alternative programs in Snohomish include AIM High School, a comprehensive program that offers a high school diploma with the same graduation requirements as Snohomish High School, Re-Entry programs for high school students, APEX online learning, ALC for middle school students, and the Parent Partnership Program for home school students.

Until the district's 2006 acquisition of Parkway, a former nursing home, alternative programs were housed in various locations throughout the district. For ten years, Shirey worked out of her car, driving from one program to the other. Except for the Parent Partnership Program, all the district's alternative programs are now under one roof, giving students more options.

Alternative education is similar to special education in that the student has an individualized program, but without the federal mandates and paperwork required in special education. Washington State laws provide a great deal of flexibility balanced with accountability. "In other states, students have to be labeled "troubled" to access alternative programs, but our state is more positive, with the understanding that kids have different ways of learning, different needs, and that traditional schools don't work for everyone," notes Shirey.

Shirey likes learning new things and is tireless when developing new programs for kids. She began the K-12 Parent Partnership Program (PPP) in Snohomish after a two-year partnership with Monroe to provide services for home school students. "The home school population in Washington is huge; this was another need the district saw that needed to be addressed. It was a big learning curve, but I loved the idea that it was another option and provided flexibility for families to work with the schools." The PPP offers a full day of core academic classes and enrichment opportunities for students in their age groups. An experiential learning opportunity is offered every Friday for K-12 students.

Shirey's belief in people and in their potential to find an area in which they can thrive motivates her to persevere with each student. "My staff says I have rose-colored glasses, to my detriment, but I don't mind the reputation." The staff knows they have the responsibility to bring things up that Shirey may need to face. "That is critical to our effectiveness. Making a small school work is a lot of work. Everyone has to be totally involved; and it's really important to keep communication going. Everyone holds a huge piece of the whole."

Part of the job in alternative education is to personalize education for the kids and provide an avenue through which they can engage. The staff form mentoring relationships with the students, and often become lifelong friends. For example, Shirey's sons and other staff members' relatives have come to Career Day. They encourage their students' parents to participate too.

Former students stay in touch with Shirey; they become friends, and she enjoys seeing how their lives work out. People in their 30's and 40's still see her as a mentor, and some former students have become staff at AIM High School.

"Sometimes people do leave here and say they are never coming back. But then they call 6 months later. They know they can come in and talk to me, and that we can start over."

Snohomish School District – Alternative Programs

AIM High School

AIM serves approximately 125 students in grades 9-12 who have not found success in a traditional school setting. AIM works with students to earn their high school diploma, while individualizing their education as needed. Students attend four days a week for three hours and are responsible for completing work outside of class. Students can also participate in Sno-Isle Technical High School, Running Start, and classes at Snohomish High School, if appropriate. AIM provides a daycare on site for teen parents.

High School Re-Entry

This program serves approximately 50 students per semester who need a temporary place to complete credits for the current semester. Students are referred to Re-Entry if they have been dropped from Snohomish High School or Snohomish Freshman Campus for attendance or behavioral problems, if they have entered the school district too late to easily match their schedule to the high school, or if there are other reasons which prevent them from being successful in the regular program. Students sometimes use this experience to determine if they want to re-enter Snohomish High School, apply to AIM, or work on their GED.

Middle School Alternative Learning Center (ALC)

Designed as a temporary alternative, Re-Entry prepares middle school age students who have been placed there for motivational or behavior issues to return to their home school.

Parent Partnership Program (PPP)

Designed to serve the needs of home schoolers and their families, the PPP offers a full day per week per age group of core academic classes and electives, ranging from math, language arts and history, to violin, Spanish, science, gymnastics, and cooking. An experiential learning program for K-12 students is offered every Friday. Each student receives an allotment to pay for lessons, books, and field trips. Current enrollment is 145 students.

APEX Learning

The district's online learning environment is specifically designed to meet the learning needs of middle school and high school students. The curriculum, which covers both core and Advanced Placement subjects, is aligned to relevant state and national standards, and uses technology to keep students alert and engaged. Apex provides opportunities for students to work on credit acceleration and credit retrieval. All courses are given by trained Apex teachers, and each student is assigned a Snohomish School District Mentor to track progress and monitor tests. Over 50 courses are available.

###