



Oak Forest and Lanier Educators Named HISD's Teachers of the Year

Tiffany Janish and Dennis Huffman named elementary and secondary winners, respectively

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A kindergarten teacher at **Oak Forest Elementary School** and an integrated physics and chemistry teacher at **Lanier Middle School** have been named the top two educators in HISD for 2009.

Oak Forest's **Tiffany Janish** earned the Elementary Teacher of the Year title, while Lanier's **Dennis Huffman** received Secondary Teacher of the Year laurels at the district's 34th annual Teacher Recognition Banquet, held May 11 at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

When Elementary Teacher of the Year honoree Tiffany Janish began her freshman year in college, she had no idea what her major would be. But a few months later, she took a part-time assistant teaching job in a Montessori school—and knew “from day one” what she wanted to spend her life doing.

Janish's career in education began just three years ago, as a kindergarten teacher at Oak Forest. Now, she serves as a leader among her peers, particularly in the area of technology. “Any time they have issues with their computers or PALM Pilots, SMART Boards or SMART pads, I am there to help,” she explained.

“(And) if there is a committee to be chaired, then I am willing to chair it.”

Janish bases her teaching philosophy on the power of positive reinforcement. “Students need to feel good about their learning,” she said, “(so) I make sure I am specific in my praise. I let them know what it is they have done well.”

Janish attributes her success to remaining organized. “Organization is the key,” she noted. “I do not see how any teacher can be prepared if they are not organized. My students come first, and I do all I can to provide them with lessons to keep them stimulated. I am constantly arranging and altering the structures that surround my teaching to promote a productive learning environment. I want them hanging on my every word.”

Secondary Teacher of the Year honoree Dennis Huffman also came to the education profession somewhat indirectly. Although teaching runs in his family, he said, “I always wanted to be a scientist. But as I approached the end of my science training, something finally dawned on me. I could either wash test tubes and be a graduate student for years to come, or I could give teaching a try after all.”

Huffman joined the HISD family in 1989 as a science teacher at Jackson Middle School. He has been teaching that subject along with integrated physics and chemistry at Lanier since 1994, where he ascribes his success to “having a strong personal vision.”

“Imagine the difference between a lecture about simple machines and one where kids create simple machines and learn to manipulate them in order to use the least amount of force,” he explained. “In one classroom, the students passively take notes and learn a few facts. In the other, students are actively engaged, in control of their own learning, and are excited by the new experience. Knowledge without application is usually forgotten, but once it has been used constructively and meaningfully, it's permanently attached to their memory.”



Dennis Huffman (left), an integrated physics and chemistry teacher from Lanier Middle School, and Tiffany Janish, a kindergarten teacher from Oak Forest Elementary School, were named HISD's 2009 Secondary and Elementary Teachers of the Year (respectively) on May 11. A list of all winners and finalists is below.

Huffman describes his teaching philosophy as the constant attempt to relate what kids are learning to real-world applications. "Nothing I do with my kids will touch them unless I can show how it is relevant to their own personal lives," he said. "I try to create investigations where the students design their own labs, find their own data, and make their own conclusions."

As HISD's 2009 Teachers of the Year, Janish and Huffman received \$5,000 grand prizes after being selected from among nearly 300 teachers nominated for the awards. Both will now go on to participate in the state's regional competition.

Each teacher of the year also received a \$1,000 gift certificate from I. W. Marks Jewelers. Palais Royal contributed the cash for the Elementary Teacher of the Year. The two runners-up won \$2,000. Standard Southern Corporation contributed \$1,000 each to the award and a \$500 jewelry gift certificate, while the eight remaining regional finalists won \$1,000 in cash and a \$250 jewelry gift certificate.

The district extends its sincerest thanks to all of the 2009 HISD Teacher of the Year award sponsors: Palais Royal, Standard Southern Corporation, I. W. Marks Jewelers, Houston Area Jaycees; Houston Association of Professional Landmen; Ignite Managing Director Kevin Cuneo; Emily Crosswell, Clare Glasswell, and the Herff Jones Graduation Center; and KPRC-TV, Channel 2.

[Click here](#) to read more about special recognitions awarded at this event.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR

2009 Winners and Finalists

Tiffany Janish	Oak Forest Elementary School	Elementary School Winner
Dennis Huffman	Sidney Lanier Middle School	Secondary School Winner
Melissa Iglesias	James P. Henderson Elementary School	Elementary Runner-Up
Nghia Le	Booker T. Washington High School	Secondary Runner-Up
Bonnie Bibeau	Carnegie Vanguard High School	
Amy Brown	William Holland Middle School	
Chimika Carter	Henry W. Grady Middle School	
Jacquelyn Cooper-Edwards	Energized for Excellence Academy	
Linda Gerbode	Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Elementary School	
Modesto Mendoza	Contemporary Learning Center High School	
Albertha Thomas	Mabel B. Wesley Elementary School	
Duranne Walker	James Law Elementary School	