

Wasman wins presidential award

Hickman's very own Dr. Wasman receives national recognition in Washington D.C.

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Photos submitted by Deanna Wasman from the PAEMST Event



Deanna Wasman officially accepts her award at a ceremony held in Washington D.C. on September 8. All of the k-12 educators that recieved national recognition for their exceptional teaching were honored at the event and throughout the rest of the three-day trip to Washington D.C.

On August 22, 2016, President Obama announced the 213 math and science teachers to be awarded the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. The award is the nation's highest honor for teachers of mathematics and science. It seeks to award the leaders and role models of their communities, as well as to their students and colleagues.

"The recipients of this award are integral

to ensuring our students are equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are vital to our Nation's success," said Obama, in a press release. "As the United States continues to lead the way in the innovation that is shaping our future, these excellent teachers are preparing students from all corners of the country with the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics skills that help keep us on the cutting-edge."

Hickman's Deanna Wasman was one of two math teachers to be awarded in Missouri and travelled to Washington D.C. September 7-9 to accept her award and meet the other recipients.

"I was thrilled," said Wasman. "It was just an honor to be nominated, plain and simple."

Along with a trip to D.C., Wasman was also awarded \$10,000 by the National Science Foundation.

"My car's quite old, so it's going to go in

the fund,” said Wasman.

Wasman has taught for 17 years, and currently teaches College Algebra, as well as AP Calculus AB and BC. She is also the sponsor of Mu Alpha Theta, and a coach for the Hickman Math Team.

Wasman says one of her main goals is “to show math is not just disjoint skills that are put together, it tells a story.” She says this became clear when a former student wrote in a Facebook post “I love mathematics because Dr. Wasman teaches it like poetry.” That student went on to major in Math at Vanderbilt, switching from a political science route to mathematics.

When Wasman saw the post, she was brought to tears, and now has the quote memorized.

“That’s one of the things I want to get out of it, is that it’s not something that is dry, stagnant,” said Wasman.

In February 2015, a former student of Wasman’s, Alex Fratila, nominated her for the award. In between February and May of that year, Wasman worked to complete the requirements needed, including administrative, narrative and video components, and that July, she learned that she was a state finalist.

“When I got the nomination and I started looking through the nomination process, it seemed a little daunting at first,” said Wasman.

She wanted to make sure that she had enough time during the school year to devote to the application process and the lengthy requirements.

Fratila, a 2015 Hickman graduate, nominated Wasman for the award because of her dedication to teaching mathematics.

“She is so passionate, and she passes her love for mathematics to her students, which I think is really admirable, especially because many teachers dismiss the subject as a chore, when it’s actually incredibly important and interesting,” Fratila said. “She’s brilliant, and she explains things so clearly, and every person I know who had her has taken away a positive experience, so I felt that she deserved praise for her wonderful job.”

Fratila took AP Calculus BC under Wasman her junior year at Hickman and is currently pursuing a degree in Computational Biology at Brown University.

In addition to the nomination, she had to get two letters of recommendation. One was



Deanna Wasman's headshot from her official PAEMST profile.

from Principal Eric Johnson, and another from colleague Virginia Lennon.

Once in Washington D.C., Wasman said the first few days were a lot of logistical meetings and getting to hear from a variety of speakers, including the Secretary of Energy Dr. Ernest Moniz. On Thursday, September 8, the White House had a call to action about STEM, and implementing it K-12.

“One of the big themes of that day was

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-Alex Fratila

[that] our workforce needs so much more STEM, and we’re not pumping out enough STEM-skilled workers to handle the jobs, so there was a lot of White House government initiatives to try to increase the number of people in STEM,” said Wasman.

STEM stands for the academic disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

That night, Wasman said that everyone was bussed to the Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall, where a three-hour long ceremony commenced.

Wasman said that they had combined the elementary and high school educator ceremonies unlike past events, reminding her of high school graduation.

When she went up to receive her award, Wasman described the experience as “humbling,” as well as “overwhelming, because there’s just so many awesome teachers out there.”

“It was also just wild to be around so much talent in D.C.,” Wasman said. “That was my favorite part, was meeting the other teachers, and networking with them and hearing about some of their struggles and also some of the triumphs from the classes, and sharing resources. I guess, in the end, I just feel fortunate.”

Another favorite experience began after most of the other celebrated teachers were already on the next flight home. Wasman said she and her husband decided to spend an extra day in Washington D.C. to sightsee. The President of the Council of Presidential Awardees in Mathematics casually invited any nominees on a special tour of the National Gallery of Art to see M.C. Escher’s artwork.

“I said, ‘Of course! I love M.C. Escher!’” said Wasman. “He actually brought out original artwork from the archives. There’s only like 30 pieces in the whole world of his artwork and his originals, and we got to take a magnifying glass and look at it, and he talked about the symmetries and the geometry, and it was amazing. It was just an amazing, once in a lifetime opportunity.”

Wasman concluded that she just wants to teach math “to where it’s a language, it fits together, it tells a story. I also hope that I communicate, not just mathwise, but communicate to anybody that they should find their passion and go for it.”