

The Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

and the Foreign Language Association of Missouri

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Eric Richards Named Central States Regional Teacher of the Year



Eric Richards, a German teacher and chair of the World Languages Department at Fort Zumwalt North High School in O'Fallon, Mo., was named Regional Teacher of the Year by the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (CSCTFL) at its annual conference March 13 in Minneapolis, Minn.

He was chosen from a field of six state finalists to represent CSCTFL as the region's candidate for National Teacher of the Year, an honor to be awarded by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) at its annual convention in November in San Antonio, Texas. Last fall, Richards had been named Missouri's Distinguished Foreign Language Educator by the Foreign Language Association of Missouri (FLAM).

In his 15 years at Fort Zumwalt, Richards has transformed a small German program into a large, successful, and vibrant one, where his students also enjoy the opportunity to travel abroad. He is also a presenter, published author and advocate for language programs in schools. He presents regularly on various topics in foreign language methodology and teaching strategies at regional and national conferences. He trains teachers in the Teaching for Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) method and has authored a series of readers and a short story volume that support language acquisition. He is also the creator and author of "Grafted Writing," a technique that helps teachers facilitate language acquisition through reading and writing in the classroom.

CSCTFL Executive Director Anne Nerenz praised Richards as "an award-winning German teacher who not only helps students develop higher levels of language proficiency and intercultural knowledge, but perhaps more importantly, helps students to embrace the critical importance and implications of these skills in a 'noisy' and uncertain world."

"We appreciate his vision and commitment and are delighted that he will represent each of the foreign language teachers in our 14-state region in November in the national Teacher of the Year competition," Nerenz added.

Richards "is an excellent example of the best of the skills, engagement and care that Missouri has to offer to its students of World Languages. He is tireless, determined and committed to teacher and student growth, but also he is funny and caring," said FLAM's President Tonia Tinsley. "What stands out about Eric is how much he truly cares about his students and his dedication to the profession. He also is very engaged in giving back to the teaching profession. His colleagues and fellow teachers benefit from his experience, reflection, and creativity."

Richards holds a bachelor's degree in German and International Studies from St. Louis University and a master's in Germanic Language, Literatures and Linguistics from Bowling Green State University.

The Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages advocates for world language programs and provides professional development for teachers at all levels in a 14-state region encompassing Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The state, regional, and national Teacher of the Year awards were created to share the important contributions that learning a world language in addition to English makes to each child's overall education and readiness to achieve 21st century personal and professional goals and to celebrate the teachers who make such rich, standards-based, and communication-focused learning experiences possible.