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## **Norwalk Education Foundation Sends Middle School Teachers to National Conference.**

Everyone needs a refresher in his or her job from time to time to discover new ideas, sharpen skills and learn about best practices. Recently, four Norwalk public school middle school teachers were given the opportunity to do just that when they participated in the National Middle School Association Annual Conference thanks to the Norwalk Education Foundation. With the financial support of NEF, Ashley Bonara, Ellen Knapp of Ponus Middle School, Danita Coverson of Roton Middle School and Pat Festa of West Rocks set out to join the 7,500 other teachers attending the 3-day conference in Indianapolis.

The annual conference is the nation's largest gathering for middle school educators. Attendees have access to more than 450 sessions on topic areas relevant to the middle grades including professional learning communities, differentiated instruction, classroom management, school wide literacy, becoming a global school, and technology in the classroom. Featured speakers included renowned educators such as Daniel Pink, Dr. Robert Marzano and Dr. Eugene White.

Ashley Bonara said as a new teacher, she found the experience rewarding. "The conference was informative, motivational and inspiring. As a first year teacher it exposed me to a lot of issues, and ideas that I would never have been able to learn

about otherwise. I came away with many ideas that I hope to use throughout my career.”

Pat Festa remarked that attending the conference reinforced for him that Norwalk schools are on the right track. “Overall, it was nice to see that on a national level, schools are doing things the same way that we are here in Norwalk.”

Ellen Knapp said the conference really gave her solid helpful ideas. “Instead of just concepts, I learned practical solutions to come back to my classroom with. One great idea I’ve already instituted is reviewing a lesson by playing a “Deal or No Deal” game. It gets the kids involved and thinking about the material in a new way.”

It seems all four returned refreshed, renewed and ready to teach. They will also have a chance to pass along some of their good ideas. NEF is planning a Teacher-to-Teacher workshop with the four so they can share the best practices they learned at the conference with other Norwalk middle school teachers.

When asked if they would go again, all four said definitely. Bonara summed up why for all. “Teaching as a profession is changing, and this conference allows teachers to stay educated, connected and current. I believe that Norwalk is capable of doing great things for their middle schools, and wanted to be a part of that.”

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