



Press Release

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Oak Park Educator Named 2020-21 Michigan Teacher of the Year

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OAK PARK – Oak Park School District teacher Owen Bondono was named the 2020-2021 Michigan Teacher of the Year (MTOY) today.

Bondono learned he was named Michigan Teacher of the Year during a virtual conference call meeting with all Regional Teachers of the Year. State Board of Education member Michelle Fecteau made the surprise announcement, along with State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice.

A teacher at the Oak Park High School 9th Grade Learning Community, Bondono will be entering his sixth year of teaching English language arts in the fall. Prior to teaching, he worked as a paraprofessional in the classroom for four years.

The Michigan Teacher of the Year program is more than finding the best teacher, as that would be an impossible task, Dr. Rice noted.

“The Michigan Teacher of the Year is an important advocate and ally for teachers and students,” Dr. Rice said. “We are very fortunate to be able to draw upon Owen’s expertise as the 2020-2021 Michigan Teacher of the Year and are looking forward to working with him and the other nine 2020-2021 Regional Teachers of the Year.”

Governor Gretchen Whitmer said that throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers like Owen Bondono have shown an unwavering commitment to Michigan’s children.

“Owen is a shining example of the teachers who have stepped up and found creative ways to reach and educate our students,” Gov. Whitmer said. “I’m proud to know that whether we’re in the midst of a global pandemic or not, there are teachers across the state who will go to the ends of the earth to ensure our kids get a great education.”

Bondono's selection as the 2020-21 MTOY comes after a multi-level competitive process that began with the nomination of more than 400 teachers in last fall. The field was narrowed twice and Bondono was named one of the state's 10 Regional Teachers of the Year (RTOYs) in April. Each RTOY then interviewed with a panel of statewide education stakeholders, presented a short professional development module and answered questions on a range of topics relevant to issues faced by teachers today.

"Every teacher has their own purpose, and once you find it, let it be a guiding light for every decision you make in your classroom." Bondono wrote in his MTOY application. "Ultimately, teaching is an expression of my love of humanity. My way of making my mark on the world is making the next generation better. I know that growing the next generation of humanity is a community effort, so I will create that community wherever I find it.

"If we could provide every student with a classroom where they feel safe and seen, we would see learning increase by any metric," said Bondono.

The RTOYs will serve together during the upcoming school year as the 2020-2021 Michigan's Teacher Leadership Advisory Council (MTLAC), which is comprised of the year's RTOY cohort. During their year of service, the RTOS work directly with MDE and other Michigan educational stakeholders to find solutions to issues facing the state's schools and children, to ensure that the voices of teachers are present in these discussions.

In addition to his work on the MTLAC, Bondono will serve as an advocate for teachers statewide. Bondono will engage in discussions on how best to continue improving Michigan's schools with a non-voting seat at the monthly State Board of Education meetings, and as a member of the Governor's Educator Advisory Council. Bondono is also the state's candidate for the prestigious National Teacher of the Year award.

Program expenses for the Michigan Teacher of the Year, as well as the Regional Teachers of the Year and Michigan Teacher Leadership Advisory Council are offset through the generous support of the Meemic Foundation, now celebrating its 14th year as the program's sponsor. The Meemic Foundation presents each RTOY and their school with a plaque commemorating their accomplishment.

"The success of Michigan education starts with our amazing, tireless teachers," said MEEMIC Foundation Director Pamela Harlin. "Serving our 14th year as the MTOY program sponsor, The Meemic Foundation is honored to recognize Owen Bondono as the new Michigan Teacher of the Year, as well as celebrating the other nine RTOYs. In a year full of unprecedented challenges, the role of these teacher-leaders will be more important than ever before as Owen and the RTOYs work together with the Michigan education community to listen, learn, inspire and energize. Meemic is proud to recognize these education heroes that desire our praise and thanks."

To learn more about the MTOY program, the MTLAC and MDE's other educator recognition efforts, visit: bit.ly/MDE_Recognition.