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Counselor of the Year: Karla Cummings recognized for outstanding work

By Karrie Carlson Daily Journal Media
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Karla Cummings, IQ Academy counselor, believes "You can never stop learning."
Submitted

Our education system is filled with unsung heroes and under-thanked employees. The chance to celebrate one of these individuals is always a pleasure. The school counselor from an exclusively online public school in Fergus Falls won Counselor of the Year for the West Central School Counselors Association in Minnesota.

Karla Cummings works with IQ Minnesota. The fully online and fully public school caters to any Minnesota students who don't fit into the brick-and-mortar school system. Cummings joined IQ Academy in 2018, bringing more than 16 years of experience. She earned her BA in elementary education and mathematics from Minnesota State University-Moorhead. She went on to earn her MS in education from Hamline University, and an MA in school counseling from the University of North Dakota.

With her belief that online learning gives students a great education without the distractions, she has excelled at her positions and made a difference for numerous students and families.

She explains, "I continue to try new techniques to reach out to families and students to help foster that relationship and so that they feel a part of our online community." One of the biggest challenges she had when switching to on-line school was not seeing the students face-to-face.

"I no longer was able to say hi walking down the hallway or talk with students in my office. I have always thrived at finding ways to meet and overcome challenges in my career and was determined to make great relationships with students and families without actually seeing them face to face."

One thing that makes Cummings stand out is her ability to think outside the box and find solutions. "Besides working 1:1 with students/families I have done a coding club, elementary lunch group, and some different small groups throughout the years in our online world to help build relationships with students and just to have a time where they can get to know each other outside of their classroom time," she said.

IQ Academy Minnesota is open to any state resident student in k-12th grade. There is no tuition since it is a public school and it is taught by highly qualified state licensed teachers. Students are helped every step of the way with their needs. Qualified families receive assistance with computers and printers.

Teachers and counselors, like Cummings, are available to students like teachers at traditional schools. For this award, Cummings was considered among other MN counselors, some who perform their jobs entirely through an in-person school setting. So how does Cummings feel about her recognition?

"I am not one for accolades as I am a person that really just wants to find ways to help students and am always striving to learn new things that can help students. I am a big believer in 'you can never stop learning'. I did however appreciate the recognition as so many school counselors that do the hard work and wear many hats in schools don't often get recognized in their roles."

More information about IQ Academy can be found at iqacademymn.k12.com and fergusotters.org.

Karrie Carlson