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Sousa Educator Garners National Teaching Award

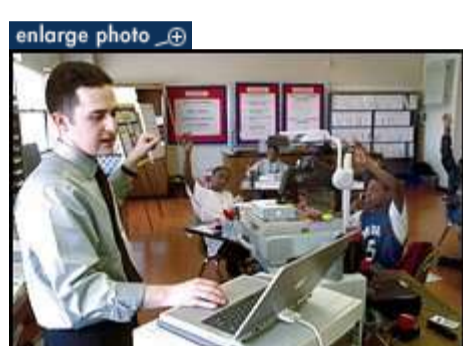
Contest Picks 1st D.C. Honoree

By V. Dion Haynes

Washington Post Staff Writer
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A math instructor at the District's John Philip Sousa Middle School has been named the National Teacher of the Year, the first time in the contest's 53-year history that a D.C. educator has won.

Jason Kamras will receive the award, considered by many teachers as their profession's most prestigious, at a White House Rose Garden ceremony tomorrow. He will serve as a national and international spokesman on a broad range of public education issues.



Jason Kamras has initiated several programs that have boosted math scores at Sousa Middle School. He will get his award from President Bush. (Kevin Clark -- The Washington Post)

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As part of the program, Kamras will take a year off with pay to fulfill the responsibilities of the title. He said he is particularly interested in using his platform to plead to policymakers that urban school systems be funded at the same levels as their suburban counterparts.

"I want to galvanize support for all resources and policies to ensure equity in public education to eliminate the achievement gap," said Kamras, 31, who was chosen from a field of 55 finalists.

President Bush also will recognize the State Teachers of the Year, including Bradford Charles Engel, a social studies teacher at Kent Island High School in Stevensville, Md., and Joseph Hills, a social studies teacher at Lake Braddock Secondary School in Burke. The award, which aims to promote teaching excellence, is distributed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and sponsored by Scholastic Inc.

Kamras was born in New York, grew up in Northern California and has a bachelor's degree from Princeton University and a master's in education from Harvard University. He came to the Southeast Washington school in 1996 through a program that places recent college graduates in under-funded urban and rural schools.

"I'm incredibly proud to be a DCPS teacher," said Kamras, who hopes the award will "bring recognition to the excellent teaching going on in D.C." and in other urban schools.

"Jason is very bright, energetic and forward-looking," said Jon Quam, director of the National Teacher of the Year program. "He has committed himself to schools with difficulty in attracting large numbers of high-qualified professionals and to under-resourced schools."

The principal of Sousa, William Lipscomb, said Kamras has initiated several innovative programs that have helped boost math scores, cutting the number of students scoring below basic comprehension from 80 percent to 40 percent.

Kamras, Lipscomb said, makes himself available before and after school and on Saturdays to tutor students. He pressed Lipscomb to double the instructional time for math, from one to two 50-minute periods a day.

"It is an honor to have a teacher like Jason in our school system because he not only serves to inspire students to academic excellence, but he can be an inspiration for his colleagues," Superintendent Clifford B. Janey said in a statement.

The award comes as school officials in the District are reviewing preliminary budget proposals from schools that call for the elimination of 395 teaching and other staff positions. Teachers also are working under an expired contract with little promise of raises as they negotiate a new one.

George Parker, president of the 5,400-member Washington Teachers' Union, said that "it's wonderful" a D.C. educator was selected for the award.

"In spite of all the negativity in the school system, we still have a teacher succeeding. This is good for our teachers' morale."

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