2008 ISTA New Teachers of the Year

Andrea Pavlik
3rd Grade, Wilder Waite Grade School, Peoria - 2nd Year

Andrea earned an associate's degree from Black Hawk College and then earned her Elementary Education degree from the University of Northern Iowa in 2003. Prior to becoming a full-time teacher at Wilder Waite, she gained valuable experience as part-time aide in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Andrea takes the challenge of teaching science in a traditionally reading and math focused elementary setting head-on. She believes in a student-first approach to her lessons. Andrea utilizes a hands-on philosophy to science as students experience everything from plant processes, physics using Lego kits, to understanding how the Earth is put together with a unique "mining for minerals" unit. The highlight of her 3rd grade class is the Invention Convention in which students develop an original invention and go through the process of creating their invention, applying the scientific method in a real life scenario. Andrea's emphasis in reading during college has helped her create a balanced approach to literacy where everything ties in together. Andrea has become a key part of the Wilder Waite staff as she serves on the SIP team and helped develop a writing handbook for the school. Colleague Coleen Martin describes Andrea as having "a genuine love of learning that is infectious with both her students and her colleagues."

Tara McDonald
6th Grade Science, Minooka Intermediate School, Minooka – 2nd Year

Tara earned a Bachelor's degree in International Studies and followed it up with a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from Loyola University in 2006. She teaches 6th grade students at Minooka Intermediate School and is an integral part of the science team there. Her lessons emphasize inquiry learning and authentic learning experiences. Tara believes in relating science concepts to everyday life. She has brought in local scientists to share their experiences in the field and encourages girls to explore fields of science through her "Girl Day in Math, Science, and Engineering" day. The highlight for Tara's classes is the "Saturday Science Field Trips." This year she took 150 students and teachers to a local pumpkin farm and Brookfield Zoo to expose students to real-life science applications. Tara's principal, Harold King, states a strength of Tara's is " the ability to collaborate with our science teacher team and community members." Tara has also launched a school-wide breast cancer awareness program with students collecting Yoplait lids.

Michael Avara
7th and 8th Grade Science, Pontiac Junior High School, Fairview Heights – 1st Year

Michael has just completed his first year teaching having graduated from the University of Illinois with an emphasis in Biology in 2007. He brings a diverse and rich background of science to his classroom tapping into real-life science connections to help bring

meaningful experience to his students. Michael promotes student led research with his Periodic Table Project in which students present each element to their classmates and create a wall-sized periodic table. Michael believes the key to science is real-life applications. He brought in a meteorologist from nearby Scott Air Force Base and linked his classroom to a local television station through "Weather Bug" for real-time weather data collection and analysis. Michael kicked off a bio-diversity blitz at a local nature park as a means to expose students to the importance of understanding the local ecology around them. Michael also took on the challenge of starting a Science Olympiad team at Pontiac Junior High, finishing 5th at their first ever regional competition. He took an active role in the development of the school's science program helping design the new science labs at their school. He is also active in the Illinois Science Teachers Association and presented at the state conference. Michael's former teacher, Kathy Costello, shares: "he understands what science education leadership means and has already taken steps to assume that role."

Rachel Stuart
8th Grade Science, Mattoon Middle School, Mattoon – 4th Year

Rachel earned her Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education from Southern Illinois University in 2003, subsequently earning a Master's Degree in 2007. Former instructor, Dr. Marilyn Lisowski states, "Rachel is one those young teachers who blossomed into a dynamic advocate and implementer of inquiry and child centered science." Rachel spent her first years as a self-contained elementary educator, integrating science throughout that school day in an already packed reading and math-focused curriculum. She currently teaches at Mattoon Middle School seeking out cutting edge methods and technologies to make science real in her classroom. She has participated in Project WET, Project WILD, and the Population Connection Training to name just a few of the professional development activities she has been involved in. Rachel has introduced the use of Lab Probeware and the interactive Student Response System to her classroom. She also takes learning outside of the walls of the classroom by using GPS and Field techniques using digital imaging. With the diversity of teaching middle school science, Rachel has integrated these techniques into the comprehensive BioBlitz program, in which she participates. Rachel's zeal and dedication for science has led her to assisting in professional development opportunities for her peers.

Mindy Waters
High School Chemistry, St. Joseph-Ogden High School, St. Jospeh – 4th Year

Mindy comes to St. Joseph-Ogden High School with a Bachelor's Degree in Teaching of Chemistry from Illinois State University and a Master's Degree from the University of Illinois. Mindy is known for her organization and preparedness of her classroom and brings a wealth of experience and background to her students. She is part of the National Science Foundation funded research program known as the Institute for Chemistry Literacy through Computational Science. The focus of this program was to develop a way to use computational visualization tools in concert with traditional teaching methods in order to improve science achievement. Mindy was instrumental in the program

gaining recognition by the NSF and the University of Illinois. Mindy also organized and implemented a support system for chemistry teachers in Central Illinois known as ChemCentrIL. This program has participants ranging from pre-service teachers to chemistry professors. This model program has since encouraged other regions in Illinois to develop similar support programs. Mindy has presented at a number of professional development activities and is constantly seeking ways to improve her ability as an educator. Principal Brian Brooks states: " Mindy has shown excellent qualities as a teacher in her short career and because of her work ethic and character I only see her continuing to grow as a teacher."