

Avoca celebrates learning, collaboration, connections

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Avoca School District 37 continues to be a premier school district in the north suburbs of Chicago.

Living its mission of maximizing the unique potential of each child, this district provides a wide array of opportunities for students to excel beyond academics. In February, five creative writing pieces by four different students were recognized at the national level through the

Scholastic Art and Writing Award program. Along the visual art branch of Scholastic's program, six different works from another four students also received national recognition. Eleven students medaled at the Science Olympiad National Championships this year, extending Avoca's long tradition of excellence in this arena.

Had you attended Evanston Public Library's Second Annual Storytelling Festival last October, you may have had the pleasure of watching fourth- and

fifth-grade students from Avoca West Elementary School spin tales in the rich, traditional storytelling style of old.

The philanthropic efforts of Avoca's students must also be lauded.

Last spring, Marie Murphy students collected \$3,800 to be split between the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund, Back on my Feet Chicago, and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Last June, Bernie's Book Bank recognized Avoca West for donating at least 5,000 gently

used children's books for the last three years. Marie Murphy eighth graders constructed 130 "survival kits," donating them to Connections for the Homeless in Evanston. Most recently, students at Avoca West made quite a large donation of clothing, food and personal items to Journeys: The Road Home, a non-profit agency that provides shelter, social services and housing to the homeless across the north and northwest suburbs.

With all of those accomplishments while still

being one of the highest performing school districts in the state academically, 2016 was a year of reflection, vision and planning for Avoca. In January, the district conducted a thorough system assessment to measure itself against the best-practice criteria of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Education criteria and the Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities.

Approximately 175 people participated in this process, which led to a detailed report that was

used to inform the Strategic Planning Committee, made up of Board of Education members, parents, staff and administrators. The resulting strategic plan produced five over-arching district goals in the following areas: student learning, collaborative teams, continuous improvement systems, family and community connections, and effective and efficient use of resources.

With so much to celebrate, Avoca still continues its push towards excellence.