

## **New Jersey Teacher Recognized with Rising Star Award**

Arlington, Va., March 3, 2026 – Michael Kovach, a Special Education Teacher at the Roxbury Board of Education, received the 2026 Rising Star Special Educator of the Year Award from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This award recognizes a CEC member teacher in the first five years of their special education career who has shown exceptional potential for leadership in teaching, service, and scholarship.

Michael’s journey to special education started at home. His younger brother’s disability helped to shape his understanding of education and the teacher’s role.

“Helping my brother with his homework was not only an opportunity to support him but also an experience for me of discovering new ways to make learning accessible and engaging,” shared Michael. “Through him, I learned an invaluable lesson. Education should not focus on what a student cannot do, but rather on what they can do, building on their strengths and potential.”

Michael has worked as a 7<sup>th</sup>-grade in-class resource teacher since 2023, where he brings heart, humor, and dedication to his students.

“Visionary thinking guides Michael’s teaching approach. He does not simply accommodate his students but empowers them to meet high expectations,” shares his nominator.

His colleagues have noted his strong commitment to the school, playing a role in creating a welcoming school culture where students feel safe and valued. He serves as the defensive coach for the high school ice hockey team and often steps up to serve as the school mascot to help energize students during pep rallies and events. Michael has been nominated for his school’s Teacher of the Year award for the past two years, despite not yet being eligible to run, reflecting his colleagues and community’s respect and support for his contributions.

His students have been deeply impacted by their time with Michael and have shared thoughts like, “He is always there for help and takes his time to do anything for you to understand the lesson,” and “He’s the only reason I learn in class,” and “Mr. Kovach is always friendly in the hallway and always puts a smile on my face. Whenever someone needs help, you can always know that you can go to Mr. Kovach no matter if it related to school or a personal problem.”

Kovach will be recognized this March, along with other CEC Professional Award recipients at the CEC Convention & Expo in Salt Lake City, Utah.

---

---

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable for individuals with disabilities. Learn more about CEC at <https://exceptionalchildren.org/>.