

Hayes HS Teacher Named Special Ed Teacher of the Year

Delaware, Ohio - Rebecca Saunders, an intervention specialist at Hayes High School, has been named the 2026 Teacher of the Year by the Council for Exceptional Children. The award recognizes teachers working with students with disabilities whose work exemplifies the best in special education teaching and reflects significant, documented positive outcomes for students, continued professional development, and the highest standards of educational quality.

Her peers nominated Saunders for her ability to “blend real-world experiences with individualized instruction,” including the creation of the school’s pantry and free store.

“Becky is both innovative and selfless,” writes Christine Griffin, special education supervisor at Hayes High School. “She sees a problem and then works until she finds a solution.”

The selection committee was also impressed by Saunders’ commitment to mentoring new teachers and paraeducators. Becky has created a sense of community through the school’s and district’s special education staff, fostering an understanding of the importance of their work.

“Mrs. Saunders is not only doing the work, but she’s ensuring the next generation of educators is prepared to do the work,” said Chad Rummel, Executive Director of the Council for Exceptional Children. “It’s this kind of commitment to the field that deserves national recognition.”

“At Let’s Go Learn, we know that great teachers change lives,” said Richard Capone, CEO of Let’s Go Learn. “Sponsoring the CEC Teacher of the Year allows us to recognize exceptional educators like Becky, whose dedication and leadership help students thrive.”

Saunders will be recognized this March, along with other CEC Professional Award recipients, at the CEC Convention & Expo in Salt Lake City, Utah. In addition, she will receive a \$2,000 cash prize, as well as a \$1,000 classroom grant. The national contest is sponsored by CEC and its partner, Let’s Go Learn.



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