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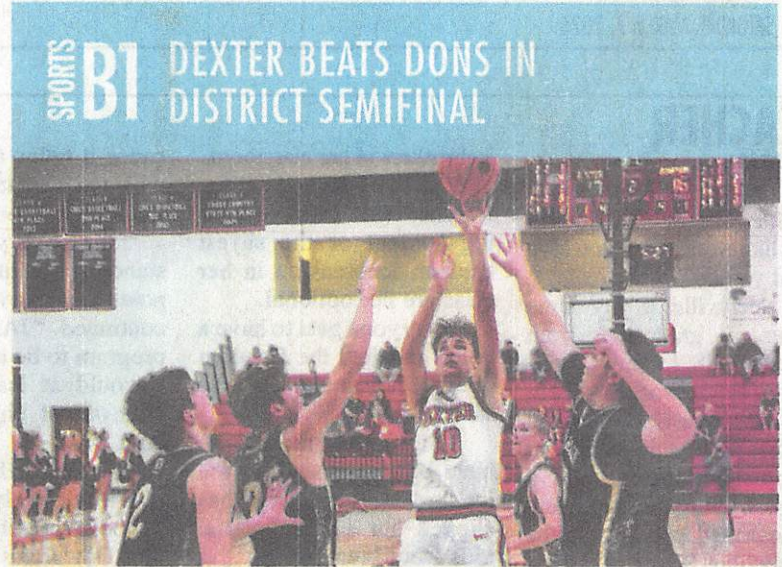
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## JAG teacher helps students find their voice



*Top Teacher is an ongoing series featuring outstanding educators in the area.*

By **PRINCE WRIGHT**  
Daily American Republic

Neelyville Schools recognized four of its teachers for the extraordinary work they are doing with the students. One teacher in particular is Shannon Davis, a veteran educator who has dedicated her life to helping young people build their future.

This is Davis's third time being recognized as Building Teacher of the Year, and her first time being recognized as District Teacher of the Year.

"I was shocked because all of the other three ladies are wonderful teachers at their levels, and I felt they were all just as deserving of that award," Davis said.

After 32 years, Davis said she still finds excitement in her work.

Davis said, "When you love what you do, it doesn't feel like work. That's why I'm at year 32, and there is not an ounce of burn-out."

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DAR/Prince Wright  
**Neelyville School District Teacher of the Year Shannon Davis walks her students through the process of filling out an application for jobs.**

# TEACHER

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She added, "It doesn't feel like work when you love what you do."

"Neelyville is my alma mater. I graduated from here in 1988; I knew I wanted to be a teacher. There was nowhere else I wanted to teach," Davis said, "so I came back here, built a home with my husband, and we enrolled our kids in the Neelyville School District. There's nowhere else I'd rather work."

It's clear in her voice when talking about the school district that she means every word she says.

Neelyville High School Principal Justin Dobbins said, "Everybody has a go button; some are just a little harder to find than others, but if you have empathy and work hard to show you care, students will start to trust you."

Davis has perfected finding those "go buttons" for the last 32 years, and something visible when she interacts with students. They're not just students, they've become her kids, her extended family.

Davis speaks with excitement and enthusiasm about her students. She believes that when it comes to teaching young people, everything matters, even the setup of the classroom.

Davis says that her classroom is a non traditional classroom. There are no desks in straight rows, she explained. There's a relaxed atmosphere with sofas and a safe place for students to be themselves.

"I think it's a very inviting atmosphere where the students feel at home," she said.

Davis explained that JAG is an elective that students can choose every year, and without fail, she says her students continue to come back.

Davis believes every child has a voice, and their voice needs to be heard, which is why every day for years now, she has made it a point to do

icebreakers in her classroom.

She explained that whether the most outgoing student or the shyest student, icebreakers in her class are not optional.

"Everyone gets to have a voice and feel the freedom to express themselves," she said.

She said that there have been times when the ice breaking moment has slipped her mind, but the kids would remind her.

It's these moments that Davis says have impacted so many of her students who have gone on to achieve great success.

Davis recalls one student who was positively impacted by being in the JAG program.

"I remember a student who came up to me three years ago and said, 'Today is a big day for me, I was addicted to opioids, and I am now one year clean.' After that, each year when that day would roll around, we would remember his milestone and celebrate him in our class. He loved that," she said.

Davis continued, "I see so many kids come into this program who are extremely shy and withdrawn, and through the talking we do and the activities, they open up more, and you learn about them, and that's when you can truly help them."

And this is why her class involves a lot of team-building and competitive games.

Bradán White, a Neelyville High School freshman, said, "When I first joined Mrs. Davis's class at the beginning of the year, I was a bit nervous due to her being firm, but she's a really good teacher, and the way she is has helped me out a lot."

"Being a part of the JAG program has taught me how to fill out job applications, which you need, and the opportunities that I've had going out to job fairs have really been beneficial be-

cause it helps us figure out what we want to do with our lives," he added.

"She holds you to a high standard because she sees potential in everyone," he continued. "JAG is a great program to be a part of, and I would at least take one year out of high school to do it."

Elizabeth Hindle, a junior at Neelyville High School remembers thinking that Davis was a very positive and outgoing teacher. She says that Davis helped her a lot throughout the years.

"I used to be in a very bad place, and this class, as well as Davis, has helped me," Hindle said.

Hindle says that last school year, her house burned down, and as always, Davis was there and offered to buy her anything that was lost in the fire.

She says that it's more than a career class; it's like coming into a family with open arms.

Davis explained that JAG is a career-based class. She tries to expose students to all the possibilities that await them after graduation, while still not wanting them to feel pressured to do anything.

"We have the military come and talk with the students, and we take trips throughout the year for career exploration," she said.

She hopes that by not putting pressure on her students, they will go on to explore and make the best choice for their futures.

"Let them explore the world and then see if college is for them," she said.

Davis says she wants other teachers to know that "teaching is something you have to love. You have to have a heart for what you do and your students."

She said, "Don't listen to the media or the news when it comes to education. I can't imagine doing anything else. Focus on the age (you) feel called to."



DAR/Prince Wright

**Neelyville Teacher of the Year Shannon Davis poses with freshman Bradan White.**