

[Colrain Central School teacher recognized for work with school's youngest learners](#)

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Published: 03-15-2025 3:31 PM

COLRAIN — In her fifth year teaching kindergarten and fostering independence in Colrain Central School's youngest learners, Grace Ahrensdorf has been named a winner of the 2025 Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award.

Ahrensdorf said she was shocked to learn she had been selected for this year's Excellence in Teaching Award, also known as the Grinspoon Award. She said she feels honored that her colleagues submitted her name to the nomination committee, and that her work building playtime into learning time and teaching some of the school's youngest students to be independent is appreciated.

"I was very surprised," she said. "It was a bit of shock, but it feels good to win something and be recognized."

Since 2003, the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, in partnership with the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation, has been recognizing teachers across Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties with the Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Awards. Colrain Central School Principal Amy Looman surprised Ahrensdorf with the announcement at an all-school assembly earlier this month, and presented Ahrensdorf as the Mohawk Trail Regional School District's 2025 winner to the School Committee on Wednesday, March 12.

"Grace is a very humble teacher. She is very thoughtful and intentional with everything she does in the classroom, and is very caring and compassionate," Looman said. "She fosters independence like you wouldn't believe. It's like you go into the classroom and 5-year-olds are putting stuff away. It's amazing."

Looman said students love Ahrensdorf, with some young pupils saying that Ahrensdorf is "the best teacher ever" and that she "makes us do stuff that makes our brain grow."

As a kindergarten teacher, Ahrensdorf has a lot on her plate. She has to manage the classroom and keep students on schedule while teaching them appropriate classroom behavior, as well as counting and reading. Ahrensdorf said her favorite subject to teach is reading, and she loves to incorporate as much fun as she can into each day.

"I really enjoy teaching them how to read, and helping them figure out letters and sound," she explained. "I'm always trying to get more play and hands-on activities into their schedule."

She said she also loves showing students that they are capable of doing a lot even when they are small.

“Something I always try to instill in them is independence. Even though they are young, they can still do a lot,” Ahrensdorf said.

Superintendent Sheryl Stanton said she likes to visit Ahrensdorf’s classroom when she is having a difficult day because seeing the students so engaged in their learning always makes her smile.

“You can just sense when you’re in that classroom that students are engaged and they’re engaged in really rigorous work,” Stanton said. “They believe they can do hard things, and as kindergarten students, it’s so important for them to believe they can be strong learners, but also be good friends in the classroom and help each other.”

Ahrensdorf said she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. She has always loved working with kids, and spent a lot of time babysitting and working at summer camps in high school and college. “Ever since I was a kid I always loved other kids, and working with younger kids,” Ahrensdorf said.

She added that she was inspired by her own teachers growing up to pursue a career in education. “I was lucky enough to have good teachers growing up,” she said, “and I knew early on that I wanted to be a teacher.”

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Source: <https://www.recorder.com/Colrain-Central-School-teacher-recognized-for-work-with-school-s-youngest-learners-59922778>