

RIVERVIEW GARDENS SCHOOL DISTRICT  
NEWS RELEASE

Aug. 21, 2009  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Riverview Gardens Teacher Selected as Finalist for Missouri Teacher of the Year**

Zac Thurwalker, a physical education teacher at Highland Elementary in the Riverview Gardens School District, has been selected as one of six finalists in the 2009-10 Missouri Teacher of the Year program.

This is the first time a Riverview Gardens teacher has advanced to being a finalist in the state Teacher of the Year program, according to officials with the Riverview Gardens School District and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Humble about this recognition, Thurwalker focuses on meaning of being a teacher. "Although I am honored to be selected as a finalist for this award, I teach the way I do to better enrich the lives of my students," said Thurwalker. "I am also thrilled to be able to bring an honor like this to the Riverview Gardens School District."

Thurwalker has taught at Highland for the past two years. Prior to his position at Highland, he taught physical education in St. Louis Public Schools.

Highland Principal Nona Greenlee said Thurwalker is an educator who is always looking at the bigger picture for the success of his students and his school.

"Mr. Thurwalker is a true team player who is interested in the good of the whole school," said Greenlee.

Beyond creating physical education classes that are fun and engaging for all of the students at Highland, Thurwalker always is looking for ways of partnering with others to bring in additional resources to improve learning opportunities for the entire school. Last year, he secured a \$23,500 grant from Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation to create an outdoor classroom and garden in the building's courtyard and fund some school improvement projects.

Thurwalker also secured a \$2,500 Jordan Fundamentals grant that paid for new fitness equipment for students. He also partnered with St. Louis Children's Hospital, which offered three programs focusing on health, fitness and personal safety. About 170 students received free bike helmets as a result of those programs.

As a physical education teacher, Thurwalker says he enjoys teaching students new skills while watching them have fun.

"My rewards are seeing students doing something for the first time," said Thurwalker. "When I see a gifted student doing something well, it is awesome to watch. What I also love is the fact that P.E. allows some students who don't do as well in the classroom to be the best in one of my classes."

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Editor's note: Zac Thurwalker can be reached at Highland Elementary School at 314-868-4561.

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