

# Watchung school community honors beloved teacher

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**WATCHUNG** – Students, parents and teachers gathered in the dozens at the Board of Education's Wednesday, June 14, meeting to share their appreciation of Gifted and Talented teacher Elaine Chesebro, who is retiring after 18 years in the district.

Superintendent Barbara Resko and Valley View Principal Mary Nunn both took the opportunity, on a night when the district honored the Teachers of the Year, to thank one of the longest tenured staff members who spent most of her career in Watchung.

"It is a real privilege and honor to have with us tonight a teacher who is retiring, which does not happen too often here in the district, but indeed we have Mrs. Elaine Chesebro, who is our wonderful Gifted and Talented and SOAR (See Our Achievements Rise program) teacher, after 18 years of service is retiring," said Resko.

The superintendent said she appreciated the "fan club" that came to support Chesebro as dozens of students, present and past, attended the meeting. Some of the students even bought presents for the teacher who meant so much to them during their elementary and middle school years.

Chesebro joined the district part-time in 1999 as a math enrichment teacher and over the years helped grow the Gifted and Talented program in Watchung, including the creation of the SOAR program.

"Mrs. Chesebro has basically single-handedly created the G and T (Gifted and Talented) program as it exists today in the Watchung School District," said Nunn.

"When Elaine first came to Bayberry School in 1999, she was hired as a part-time enrichment math teacher. It wasn't long after we worked together that Elaine worked more

and more with G and T, besides just teaching math in the classroom. Each year I tried to get you a few more hours and a few more hours and next thing you know, she was full-time in the district.

"We met in the summer one year with a group of teachers when we brought the SOAR program to life. For all of these former and current SOAR students, it's made such a huge impact in their life. It has been such a pleasure to work with Elaine each year. She has never ceased to just come up with new things all the time."

Nunn said Chesebro knew she was retiring this year, but still provided new ideas for programs and lesson plans that she was eager to roll out in the district.

"She sent me an email with a few more ideas of things she wanted to do and she certainly wasn't someone who decided since she's going to retire that she would coast through the end of the year," said Nunn. "We had a new program that I introduced to her, and instead of just saying, 'No, it's too much,' she said she would be happy to and that she was excited about the new program. She just never stops and I would venture to guess that even this weekend with three half days left she has amazing plans left."

"She's worked with our community, she's worked with our teachers, and she's embraced teachers at Bayberry and Valley View... It certainly is going to be sad to see her retire, but we are certainly happy to see that she will be moving on and enjoying life without coming to school everyday. We thank you, we love you and we're going to miss you."

After Nunn shared her appreciation for her 18

years with Chesebro, former and current students took the opportunity to thank her for all she did for them.

"SOAR has been such an amazing opportunity for all of us and we'd just like to thank you for making it so great for us," said eighth grader Charlie Margulies.

Margulies presented Chesebro with a painting of the comic characters "Calvin and Hobbes," a favorite of Chesebro's, that was signed by dozens of former and current SOAR students.

"I've only had Mrs. Chesebro for two years and it's been the best two years and 30 or 40 periods of my life; I thank you for that," said Charlie's younger brother, William, gathering the signatures for the painting with older sister Alanna.

Fifth grader Dominic Sicola spoke of how much he learned from Chesebro in the three years he's been in her class.

"The SOAR program gave me something to look forward to at school," said Sicola. "The projects that we did allowed us to use our own minds to come up with something and use what we were passionate about to do better things, and for that I am really going to miss Mrs. Chesebro as my SOAR teacher."

Next came seventh grader Finn Sorenson, who had high praise for his teacher.

"Sometimes in books and movies they'll have a teacher who is unrealistically, super-humanly good," said Sorenson. "Mrs. Chesebro is that teacher. Mrs. Chesebro is somehow beyond the level of human possibility. Mrs. Chesebro doesn't go by the books. For example, the books would say you work eight hours a day, and Mrs. Chesebro lets us stay hours after school, she takes us to New York for Model U.N., she helps my unhealthy addiction to public speaking."

"I think I can speak for all of us in this room when I say I'm going to miss Mrs.



Superintendent Barbara Resko, left, is alongside retiring Gifted and Talented teacher Elaine Chesebro during the board's Wednesday, June 14 meeting. Chesebro retired after 18 years of service to the district.

Chesebro."

Several Watchung Hills Regional High School students, including freshman Kaelin Churchill, also attended the meeting to share how their fondness for the teacher.

"I've had Mrs. Chesebro for six years," said Churchill. "I started in third grade in the SOAR program and finished in my eighth grade year; since our first day she taught us how to tap into the creative side of our brains and think outside the box. I've done so many projects with her, and no matter how many times I've kind of not liked them or kind of loved them, it was always a wonderful experience having her as a teacher and I loved

having class."

"She was not only a teacher to me and my fellow peers, but she was an emotional support... Mrs. Chesebro was more than a teacher, she was the most genuine, kind friend that anyone could have and I'm thrilled to know that you were my teacher."

After some tearful hugs and "thank-you's", Chesebro addressed the crowd, and the school board and administration.

"Dr. Resko and the board, you've supported the SOAR program for all of these years and I really appreciate that you realize how important it was for these kids and how you recognize their successes, their work, and acknowledged that

they needed to be in that program," she said. "Mrs. Nunn, you've supported me, encouraged me, allowed me to try new things. We grew this program together; thank you."

"SOAR-ians, it's your turn. You guys are great people, you really are. It's been a joy to work with you and I don't know if you realize that I learned a lot from you. I learned about caring, kindness, curiosity, a passion for learning, quirkiness and acceptance. It's been a really great experience for me... Over the years, you've made me laugh, you've challenged me, sometimes frustrated me but I love you, all of you, and I will never forget you."