



For more information, contact:
Claudia Morlan, 713-524-0661 or
Carrie Pillsbury, 713-296-6776

Fund for Teachers Announces Expeditionary Learning Schools' Plank Fellowship Award Winners

National non-profit also names national winner and multiple local winners around the country

May 5 – (Springfield, MA) Celebrating America’s top teachers on National Teacher Day, Fund for Teachers and its partner, Expeditionary Learning Schools (ELS), today named Cindy Coughlin and Sandra Collins of Alice B. Beal Elementary in Springfield, MA, ELS’ winner of the Plank Fellowship Award.

Named for Fund for Teachers’ Founder Raymond Plank, the Plank Fellowship Award is given annually to the teacher who made the most of their summer odyssey (he/she designed and Fund for Teachers made possible) upon returning to the classroom.

Last summer, Cindy and Sandra designed a fellowship taking them to Norway to research “Friluftsliv” – an ethic combining physical, mental and social pursuits of outdoor activity. Upon returning to their classrooms, this teacher team created “Friluftsliv Expeditions,” monthly , full-day outdoor classrooms incorporating hiking, leisure walking, snowshoeing and orienteering; constructed a “Full Value Contact” program, expanding on the physical, mental and social well-being of students in all grades; hosted *International Walk to School Day*, the only school in the district to do so, mapped *Safe Routes to School*, also the only school in the district to do so; developed *Family Park Walks*, reconnecting families with public park lands; installed bike racks and subsequent student rider/bike rodeos, and bike safety classes; conceived *Mighty Milers*, a running/walking incentive program, the first of its kind in the state; implemented a *Good Neighbor* project, teaching students how to be good neighbors to the surrounding homes near the school; forged multiple partnerships with the Parks Department to intensify school’s commitment to the community by combining forces to bring about positive changes to our surroundings; and presented at the annual Massachusetts Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance (MAHPERD) conference.

“Within weeks of returning from our fellowship, we entered the new school year still reeling from our trip. The excitement of the experience swirled into a frenzy of new ideas which were implemented and are presently running strong with constant growth,” said Cindy and Sandra. “The enthusiasm gained from our Fund for Teachers fellowship is still a strong presence in our teaching styles. It was just the impact we needed to inspire us to continue to make a difference in the lives of our students.”

“The greatest testimony of all is the reaction from students themselves,” said Sandy Frederico, director of community programming and special events for the Springfield Department of Parks, Buildings & Recreational Management. “Students have literally walked away from their exposure to this “no limits” classroom with a greater understanding and appreciation for a natural resource that is available to them long after the bell rings at the end of the school day. Their explorations assumed new heights of learning and enthusiasm never previously realized.”

Fund for Teachers named Corey Pickering, Millennium High School in Manhattan, its national Plank Fellowship Award winner. Additional winners from the nonprofit’s partner programs include: Kathy Clunis, Boston; Trey Thames, Houston; Donna McSweeney and Lynn Talamini, Rural Schools & Community Trust; Erin Goodling, San Francisco; Melody Afill and Donna McChesney, Oklahoma; Rob Jeffers, Los Angeles; and Julie Anderson, Oakland.

Fund for Teachers also announced today its list of 2009 grant recipients. Descriptions of the new Fellows’ upcoming odysseys, as well as how the Plank Fellowship Award winners implemented their 2008 fellowships are available at <http://www.fundforteachers.org/press.html>.

Made possible by individual and corporate donors, Fund for Teachers has awarded more than \$12 million in grants to approximately 3,500 of America’s top educators over the past nine years. Based in Houston, Fund for Teachers enriches the personal and professional growth of America’s top teachers as they identify and pursue opportunities around the world that will have the greatest impact on themselves, their students and their communities. For more information on how you can make teachers’ dreams a reality, visit www.fundforteachers.org.

Expeditionary Learning Schools (ELS) is a national non-profit organization with a mission to create and sustain good schools (K-12) in places where good schools are most needed, and to support the transformation and improvement of existing schools. Through a partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, ELS has helped to open 18 college-oriented high schools in low-income, urban neighborhoods. Established from roots in Outward Bound USA, which joins wilderness challenge with character, the ELS approach to teaching and learning is active, inquiry-based, project-based, and compels students and teachers to achieve more than they thought possible.

###