



New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome
AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

*Collaborative Partnerships
for the Tourette Syndrome Community*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Good Shepherd Academy first-grade teacher is the 2012 NJCTS Educator of the Year

Anita Riccardelli, nominated by 2nd-grade student Erin Miskell and her parents for Riccardelli's exceptional work in and out of the classroom, is one of two educator award winners this year

NUTLEY – Once a student progresses on to the next grade – especially in elementary school – whatever interaction that student had with his or her teacher usually ends. But when Erin Miskell graduated from Anita Riccardelli's first-grade class at the Good Shepherd Academy during the spring of 2011, it was not the last time she had contact with Riccardelli.

And in Miskell's case, that's a very good thing. Riccardelli, known for doing whatever she can to help her students succeed, went above and beyond the call of duty for a teacher – continuing to aid Miskell's educational development throughout her second-grade year. For her exemplary service, Riccardelli has been named a 2012 New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders (NJCTS) Educator of the Year.

Riccardelli, citing her teacher's instinct of noticing a potential issue almost immediately, remembered back to last year, when she regularly would observe Miskell asking questions, being nervous, frequently erasing, trying too hard and generally getting frustrated.



Photo by NJCTS

From left, Good Shepherd Academy principal Jane Feltz and second-grade student Erin Miskell present first-grade teacher Anita Riccardelli with a 2012 New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome Educator of the Year Award. At right is Erin's mother, Melissa Miskell, who along with her husband, Greg, nominated Riccardelli for the award.

It was soon after a talk Riccardelli had with Miskell's parents, Greg and Melissa, that Miskell was diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome and one of its associated disorders, OCD.

“You don’t know if it’s normal or if it’s what she’s supposed to be doing,” Riccardelli said of Miskell’s behavior, for which Miskell started taking medication. “That’s why I felt it was important to not only alert her parents, but to help her in any way I could. Doing so helped give her the confidence she needed to succeed. She’s such a sweet girl – all she needed was confidence.”

In 2011, Riccardelli recalls Miskell struggling academically, socially and in other ways. Math was particularly difficult. But in 2012, the word problems she formerly struggled with were much easier. She began acing her tests. Miskell’s transformation, at school and at home, was like night and day.

“It was important to Erin to please her teacher, and she worked really hard every day,” said Melissa Miskell, who noted that Riccardelli often helped Erin after school until she understood it, regularly kept in touch over the summer between first and second grades, and tutored Erin whenever needed through this past school year. “This year has been so much less stress for Erin, not only due to medication changes but due to her hard work and her trust in her now-tutor, Mrs. Riccardelli. Mrs. Riccardelli puts her all into tutoring Erin and also her teaching first grade. She really cares.”

When Riccardelli received word that the Miskells had nominated her for the NJCTS Educator of the Year Award, she was surprised, honored and floored all at once. Imagine how she felt once she learned that she was the winner – and that her actions have caused people from many different walks of life to take notice.

“The letter announcing that I was the Educator of the Year was a complete shock to me,” Riccardelli said. “My daughter put it on Facebook, and I started getting congratulations from people I didn’t even know. It’s a good feeling. Helping Erin was wonderful. It’s nice to know you made a difference with somebody. As a teacher you hope you do, but you don’t always know.”

Since 2003, NJCTS has awarded 13 Educator of the Year awards – in some years, such as 2012, there have been more than one winner – and more than 200 NJCTS Children’s Scholarships to graduating high school seniors with TS. This year’s other Educator of the Year winner was Stacey Gottesman of DePaul Catholic High School in Wayne. More information about the Educator of the Year and Children’s Scholarship awards is available by calling 908-575-7350 or by visiting www.njcts.org.

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