



New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome
AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

*Collaborative Partnerships
for the Tourette Syndrome Community*

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South Plainfield Middle School Principal Kevin Hajduk named a 2013 NJCTS Educator of the Year

*Nominated by Karen Licato on behalf of her 13-year-old son, Tommy,
Hajduk is recognized for making a difference in the life of a student with Tourette Syndrome*

SOUTH PLAINFIELD, N.J. – When the Licato family met South Plainfield Middle School Principal Kevin Hajduk two years ago, their 13-year-old son Tommy was just getting used to his diagnosis of Tourette Syndrome. It’s been a long, challenging road for Licato, but thanks to the efforts of people and educators such as Hajduk, it’s also been a rewarding one.

Last September, at the beginning of the school year, Hajduk asked Licato for his input on an anti-bullying assembly and if he’d like to speak. Always eager to spread the word about Tourette Syndrome and advocate on behalf of those with special needs who are stigmatized, Licato graciously accepted. As a result, Licato’s already growing self-confidence soared to new heights.

For those actions, among many others, Hajduk has been named an Educator of the Year by the New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders (NJCTS), which annually recognizes teachers, guidance counselors, administrators and other education professionals who are making a difference in the lives of a student with TS – an inherited, misdiagnosed, misunderstood neurological disorder that affects 1 in 100 children. Hajduk was presented the award June 20 during a ceremony at the school.

“Kids, even upperclassmen, came up to me after school and congratulated me on the assembly,” said Licato, an active NJCTS Youth Advocate who regularly speaks to students, teachers, parents and health-care professionals about Tourette Syndrome. “It was wonderful. He said I was a natural and that I should look into being an ambassador for Tourette. That meant the world to me.”



Photo by NJCTS

South Plainfield Middle School Principal Kevin Hajduk, right, receives his New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome Educator of the Year Award from Karen and Tommy Licato.

Licato's activities with NJCTS occasionally require him to miss school, and Hajduk was very helpful throughout the year in facilitating that – including finding opportunities for Licato to speak and arranging Licato's school schedule accordingly. Hajduk also was highly supportive of Licato's "Dare To Be Different" idea, helping Licato set up the April 11 day in which students could demonstrate – through clothing and other means – what they loved about themselves that made them different.



Photo by NJCTS

"He is a fine role model for all the youth of South Plainfield," said Licato's mother, Karen, who nominated Hajduk for the award. "All educators should be as caring and involved in the lives of our youth. I truly believe that Tommy would not be as comfortable speaking out and being an advocate without this principal being so involved and encouraging him."

From left, Karen Licato, Tommy Licato, Kevin Hajduk, Jeffrey Licato and Jacqui Licato take part in the New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders Educator of the Year ceremony for Hajduk, Tommy's principal at South Plainfield Middle School.

Since 2001, NJCTS has awarded 16 Educator of the Year awards. In some years, such as 2012 and 2013, there has been more than one winner. This year's other Educator of the Year winners are Elizabeth Viola of The Parsons School in North Brunswick and Loren MacTaggart of Summit High School. Also in the past decade, more than 200 of New Jersey's graduating high school seniors with Tourette Syndrome have been awarded NJCTS Children's Scholarships. 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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