



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Woodstock North teacher named Illinois Best Buddies Advisor of the Year

Holly Ehlenburg's decade of building a culture of inclusion at Woodstock North High School has earned her the distinction as the Illinois 2025 Best Buddies Chapter Advisor of the Year.

Ehlenburg, a special education teacher at Woodstock North, leads a group of about 50 students devoted to breaking down barriers in the Thunder school community. Best Buddies is a non-profit dedicated to ending the isolation of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that creates friendships and leadership opportunities for all.

"It's an honor to be chosen and recognized out of every chapter in the state as doing something good and making a difference," Ehlenburg said.

Ehlenburg said she is motivated by the joy she feels each day working with special needs students. "To see other students share that joy is very rewarding."

Zoe Koulos, Illinois program manager for Best Buddies International, said Ehlenburg has gone "above and beyond" not only this year, but in each of the 10 years that she has led the WNHS program.

"Every time I have been at Woodstock North, your students go on about how amazing you are. Being able to meet you this year and hear all about how you work so hard to make your school and this world a more inclusive place has been so encouraging," Koulos said.

One of the big celebrations at North is Respect Week, where Best Buddies students demonstrate games and activities to promote respect and inclusion for people with disabilities. Ehlenburg's chapter also designed an artistic display on a hallway wall with puzzle pieces decorated by the students

Ehlenburg also started a graduation honors cord program for Best Buddies. She invited Koulos to help present the cords this year at the WNHS senior honors assembly on May 8.

"These students who have special needs aren't going to be your Dual Degrees or scholars, but they still deserve to be acknowledged for their hard work, for being a leader, being a friend to others and including other people in their lives," Ehlenburg said.

Ehlenburg also credited the chapter's success to her assistant advisor Corinne Dalman, who is also a special education teacher. She said she's sorry to see some of the seniors go

but is excited for upcoming leaders like Morgan Goldman and Lilah Mungle to step up and take over next year.

Goldman recalled a time when she asked Ehlenburg for advice as she struggled to communicate with her buddy who had some verbal limitations. "She gave me some really supportive tips and how I'm supposed to help my buddy communicate. She's really understanding and supports all of us."

Mungle said Ehlenburg's enthusiasm is evident to everyone in the program.

"I've never met someone who cares so much about what they do, and someone who wants success for everyone," she said.

Woodstock North Principal Josh Segura said Ehlenburg has woven Best Buddies into the fabric of the high school's culture.

"Ms Ehlenburg has done so much for inclusivity not only among the students fortunate enough to participate in Best Buddies but for the entire Thunder community," he said.

This certainly isn't the first Best Buddies honor for Woodstock Community Unit School District 200. Creekside Middle School was named Chapter of the Year for the fifth time in 2024 when Creekside's Julie Stone was also named advisor of the year.

"That just shows how inclusive this district has become," Ehlenburg said.