



News Release

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SUNNY BRAE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER HONORED WITH PBS TEACHERS INNOVATION AWARD

Los Angeles—Robert Schechter, a special education resource teacher at Sunny Brae Elementary School in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), has been honored with a PBS Teachers Innovation Award. The honor salutes educators who are transforming classroom learning and providing students with the tools they need to reach their full potential and succeed in the 21st century.

“Preparing our students academically so that they have a competitive edge and advantage in the future is an important part of ensuring students graduate college-prepared and career-ready,” said LAUSD Superintendent Ramon C. Cortines. “I want to congratulate Mr. Schechter on his passion for integrating innovation into his instruction, and I’d like to thank PBS for recognizing the hard work that teachers do with this award.”

“Mr. Schechter’s passion for teaching and extraordinary dedication to his students represents the best of LAUSD,” said Boardmember Tamar Galatzan, who represents Sunny Brae. “I congratulate him on receiving this richly-deserved honor from PBS.”

Schechter is the only LAUSD teacher and the only educator from the state of California to be recognized as one of PBS’ best this year. He was honored for creating a clever three-minute video called “Flu’s Clues,” that he co-produced along with his two partners, also teachers at Sunny Brae Elementary School. The subject of the video was H1N1 prevention, and special education students at the school served as actors in the video.

“I was excited, thrilled, shocked and honored when I learned about the win,” said Schechter, co-founder of ‘An Author You Can’t Refuse,’ an afterschool writing program that introduces students to the creative writing process. “It was wonderful. I also have two partners who co-created the writing program with me, and they’ve remained dedicated and involved for the past four years. They are Shannon Gordon, our kindergarten/first grade Special Day Class (SDC) teacher; and Fernando Reyes, our fourth grade, Special Day Class (SDC) teacher.”

“While the PBS Teachers Innovation Award spotlighted individual achievement, our program would not exist without the commitment and enthusiasm of Ms. Gordon and Mr. Reyes,” he continued.

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The PBS Teachers Innovation Awards program identifies innovative educators, including pre-K through grade 12 classroom teachers, library media specialists and home-school parents, and advances the profession through collaboration, networking and professional development.

“Mr. Schechter has been at Sunny Brae Elementary School for seven years and he loves helping students,” said Susan Lasken, principal of Sunny Brae Elementary School. “It’s what he does inside and outside of his classroom that gets him awards. Through ‘An Author You Cannot Refuse,’ he brings together special education students and general education students and they write imaginative short stories, some of which inspire musical and comedy videos.”

Schechter’s prize included a recent trip to Austin, TX where PBS hosted the top 10 winners with an exclusive behind-the-scenes trip to the organization’s annual membership meeting. There, Schechter attended sneak previews of upcoming programs, met with TV producers, and participated in professional development workshops focused on teacher leadership and the integration of Web 2.0 tools for collaborative learning.

“The annual meeting was very exciting,” recalled Schechter, a former TV writer. “We toured the local PBS station in Texas and worked with teachers who introduced us to new technology and online products created to improve instruction in the classroom.”

Each of the 10 winners is now working to create an innovation kit using materials and programs made available to them by PBS. The finished product will hopefully be used in Schechter’s classroom and throughout the school to improve learning and teaching. “My kit will involve using PBS materials such as videos, story boards and animation cells to enhance teaching the writing process,” he explained.

With his background as a TV writer, Schechter said innovation has allowed him to successfully merge learning and technology in his classroom and, more importantly, get his students involved. “All of the actors in “Flu’s Clues” are special education students. It was a matter of working with them, helping them memorize lines, read the lines and then perform them,” he said.

It’s no surprise that the H1N1 video has turned out to be such a success. In addition to the PBS Teachers Innovation Award, Schechter and his team recently earned a Digital Voice Award (DVA), while two other projects earned Sunny Brae Elementary School three Video In the Classroom (VIC) awards from KLCS-TV, the District’s education channel. “Our program is on a roll,” he quipped.

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