

Mary West

Montrose High School, Montrose, CO

Special Needs Education

9th-12th Grade



2005 Honorees



“Literacy is a life long skill and I want the students I work with to learn and enjoy reading or listening to books. However, it is important for them to be able to listen to and answer questions. By

taking pictures from books and allowing students to manipulate them to answer questions and sequence questions, I am able to access their learning. Often, I use the same pictures to allow students to write and tell their own stories. We work on these skills and tie them directly to being able to listen and follow directions at a job. Each student in my class goes to a job shadow experience at a minimum of three work sites. Students first observe workers at the job and then, with the help of a job coach, specific tasks are carved for individual students to experience different work tasks. This is an ideal way for high school students to begin to make a transition into the world of work.”

“A resume is a valuable tool for all students to make and presents a great challenge for non-verbal and low cognitive students. I developed a fun activity for students to do at home with their parents to help overcome this obstacle. Each student gets a disposable camera sent home with a note explaining that over the next week they should take pictures of things that are important and special to them. Other pictures can also be of them doing things they especially enjoy. Once the camera comes back to school we take a ‘field trip’ to Wal-mart to leave the film for developing. Here we are able to practice several life skills, including finding the photo department, filling out the information on the film envelope, and paying for the developed film.”

– Mary West

“It never ceases to amaze me how Mary can have so many different things going on in her room and around the school. She organizes her para-professionals so that some are out in the mainstream classes with students, some are teaching life skills, and some are working with guided practice. Mary has high expectations for student learning and she pushes them to their fullest potential. Her teaching is all about differentiation. If a student needs a modification or accommodation, she will find the best way to meet those needs.”



“Mrs. West believes in helping her students become comfortable and functional in the community. She was instrumental in partnering with Telluride Ski Resort in developing an Adaptive Ski program. About five times each season, she loads her students onto the bus, takes an hour trip to Telluride, and works with the employees and volunteers to get everyone on the slopes. Some students are on seat skis, some on regular skis, some on snowboards, and some on other adaptive ski equipment... I have traveled numerous times with the class to Telluride and there is nothing like seeing the joy on a student’s face who is normally confined to a wheel chair flying down the mountain.”

– Jill Myers, principal, Montrose High School

Other Highlights:

Nominee, Montrose County Teacher of the Year (2004)

Member, Colorado Education Association and National Education Association

Years Teaching: 28

Average Class Size: 14

Classes Taught Per Day: 4

School’s Percent of ESL Students: 8

School Type: Public, Rural

Type of Class: Self-contained