

Descombes wins teacher-of-the-year award

Dan Rosenburg

Le Soleil de Châteauguay - 6 juin 2009

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FRONT PAGE PHOTO: Harmony School principal Jo-Anne Daviau, left, congratulates music teacher Valerie Descombes for winning Quebec Music Educators' Association teacher-of-the-year award. - Photo Dan Rosenburg



Harmony School music teacher Valerie Descombes, school principal Jo-Anne Daviau and QMEA president Theodora Stathopoulos, left to right, following awards presentation at FACE School.

Harmony School music teacher Valerie Descombes was honoured last Sunday at FACE school auditorium when she was the second-ever individual to receive the Quebec Music Educators' Association teacher-of-the-year award.

The presentation was made by QMEA president Theodora Stathopoulos during the association's gala music festival concert. The annual recognition aims to support the work, effort and achievements of teachers working in music departments at schools across the province.

"I was shocked to receive this award," Descombes confessed during an interview at Harmony School last Tuesday. "I didn't understand why they chose me. There are a lot of other music teachers in Quebec who are very, very good."

"Valerie is being humble," said Harmony principal Jo-Ann Daviau, who attended the ceremony. "She's a great music teacher. She has developed a music program over the years that has been

comprehensive, inclusive and fun. She's heavily involved at the school with technology and in many other areas.

"She chairs a school-based technology committee that was struck this year and she keeps us all on our toes," Daviau praised. "She keeps us organized and on track. She's always enthusiastically jumping in to make our school life better."

As an example, Daviau cited a recent trip to a technology-absorbed school in New Brunswick. "Valerie was very much involved in the visit and in the follow-up," Daviau noted. "She's always learning."

Descombes has been with Harmony School since its inception 11 years ago. "I was recruited by (the school's first principal) Barbara Ednie and I was given the freedom to build my own music program," she says, gratefully.

Descombes was recommended for the award by Harmony School governing board chairperson Kim Jordan. That nomination was wholeheartedly endorsed by a letter of support from Daviau. "Ms. Descombes is a great source of pride for our school," Daviau wrote. "She is a truly dedicated teacher who has proven time and again that she is a true pedagogue and educational leader."

In nominating Descombes, Jordan mentioned that she had won a \$2,000 New Frontiers School Board innovative grant which enabled Descombes to purchase the necessary equipment to run a percussion program consisting of African drumming. "She is a vibrant leader who possesses the gift of being able to teach the complexity of music by making it simply and enjoyable. Despite this, she is a modest and approachable person who loves to share her extensive knowledge with others, especially her students," Jordan wrote.

Descombes was instrumental in initiating a Learning with Laptops program at Harmony, along with Grade 6 teachers Marie-Claude Tétreault and Penny Bonneville. She makes extensive use of smart-board technology at the school.