



Karen MacDonald
2014 Maine Teacher of the Year
Biographical Information

Ms. MacDonald is a teacher of English Language Arts in grades 6 and 7 at King Middle School in Portland. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Education from Mt. Holyoke College and a Master of Science in Professional Teaching from the University of Southern Maine. She is a National Board Certified teacher and has a Maine ELL (English Language Learner) endorsement. She has been teaching in the Portland school system since 1979, the start of her career in education.

Starting in 1979, Karen served as a special education technician at Longfellow Elementary and as a teacher of Project Exploration, the initial program for Portland's gifted and talented students at Lincoln Middle School. She also served as the District Coordinator for the program. In 1983, she transitioned to Baxter Elementary as a grade 4-5 teacher. Looking for a new challenge in her career, Karen took a job as language arts teacher at King Middle School in 1988.

It was around this time, under the leadership of Principal Michael McCarthy, King Middle School became one of the first three Expeditionary Learning Schools in the country. Expeditionary Learning, a school reform model, relied heavily on the teachers in those three initial schools to help develop the model and provide professional development for schools that were new to the model. Throughout this time, Karen worked to write quality curriculum, train other teachers, open her classroom to interested educators, and share her insight through publications for Expeditionary Learning.

In 1999 Karen left her classroom to take on a new role of teaching strategist at King Middle School. In this position, she helped others at the school continue to develop their own expertise around the Expeditionary Learning Model. In addition, she oversaw the transition to student-led conferencing. The school moved from a school where around 60% of parents attended parent conferences to a school where 97% came into school to learn about their child's work. During her five years in this position, Ms. MacDonald also helped host two national conferences for Expeditionary Learning and continued to present to educators locally, in the state of Maine, and throughout the country.

In 2004 Ms. MacDonald returned to the language arts classroom at King. Due to

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the rise in the ELL population at the school, now at roughly 30%, she earned her ELL endorsement through the University of Southern Maine, and in 2009 she earned her National Board Certification in English Language Arts/Early Adolescence. Her drive for continuous improvement at the classroom, building, and district level led her to design a course, sponsored by the district and the Portland Education Association, for teachers in years 3-5 of their career. A cohort from this course emerged at King and these teachers, along with Karen, have led the push to a standard-based system at King, which began in earnest in the fall of 2013.

As a teacher at King, she has had many amazing experiences. A clear highlight was when four of her students presented at the National Conference for Expeditionary Learning in 2010, where they delivered an inspiring keynote address to a room of 600 educators about their work on a civil rights expedition! Karen is always ready to be challenged, and each day she comes to King excited to learn alongside her students.

Karen and her husband Terry, a retired teacher, live in Portland. They have two adult children who both attended the Portland Schools. When she is not teaching, Karen enjoys reading, cross-country skiing and traveling.

King Middle School serves an ethnically and economically diverse middle school population. Karen was one of the first Expeditionary Learning teachers when the model was created in 1992. Karen is considered an accomplished designer of Learning Expeditions in the Expeditionary Learning Schools national network and has designed and implemented developed professional development for the EL Learning Site Seminars and National Conference.