

380 Livia Thomas Fremont's Teacher of the Year

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Foreground: (Left to right): Teacher Livia Thomas holds her Fremont Teacher of the Year plaque with Alameda County Superintendent of Schools, Sheila Jordan.
Back row: (Left to right): Alameda County Board of Education Trustee, Eileen McDonald; Principal of Grimmer Elementary, Donna Tonry and Fremont Superintendent of Schools, Milt Werner.

BY MIRIAM G. MAZLIACH
PHOTO BY MIRIAM G. MAZLIACH

The excitement and energy emanating from Livia Thomas are hard to miss when she speaks with and about her students. But her students knew something special was happening in their classroom when several adult visitors appeared.

"We are here today to recognize someone very important," said Alameda County Superintendent of Schools, Sheila Jordan, who stopped by to congratulate Thomas. "We have the best teacher in Fremont; your teacher Livia Thomas is Teacher of the Year."

Twenty-eight teachers were nominated for Fremont's Teacher of the Year. At the Fremont Unified School District Board meeting on May 12, Thomas was announced as this year's winner.

She asked the students, "So, who would you vote for?" They all answered in unison, "Miss Thomas!"

Thomas is the Title I Specialist at Grimmer Elementary, a "Distinguished school," and has been at Grimmer since 1989. Grimmer is one of two Title I schools in Fremont. Fifty-four percent of their students are socio-economically disadvantaged and

approximately the same percentage are English learners.

She has worked as the Title I Specialist for the past 11 years. "I work solely with underserved kids, students with the greatest need - those who are English learners and/or who are performing below grade level standards. I teach language arts intervention classes and English Language Development classes. This year, I am working primarily with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders. These students are my passion and my joy," said Thomas.

"We have amazing students and teachers and really the students in these classes have set many goals for themselves. They strive for excellence and take risks. They persevere when assignments are difficult. The students are curious and set goals for high achievement. They have only been here a short while and are learning English quickly."

"This is fantastic," said Fremont Superintendent of Schools, Milt Werner. "I've known of Thomas for quite a while and what an outstanding teacher she is."

"It's such a wonderful example when you can see the learning that has gone on in a relatively short amount of time," said Jordan. "The students are

proud of their heritage and their new learning skills. Excellence at every level is so very exciting."

Grimmer Principal Donna Tonry explained, "These boys and girls, had failed to strive and now they are interested and involved. These kids used to be the ones not seen or heard in class. Now they carry themselves with pride and speak up in class. Their regular classroom teachers say to Thomas, "You've transformed my student!"

It's a mutual admiration society as Thomas expressed the support she has felt from Tonry and the school as a whole. "She's an amazing principal who has a wonderful relationship with the staff, teachers, parents and other administrators. We are lucky to have her and she makes the culture of school so supportive. Donna brought us together."

Thomas added, "I am proud to say that the teachers at Grimmer look deeply at our beliefs surrounding the concept of equity and cultural proficiency, use best practices to allow access to the curriculum for all students, and collaborate regularly to inspire our students to be the best that they can be. And isn't that what quality public education is really all about? I have the best job in the world."