

RIVIER ALUM AWARDED 2008-2009 NH COUNSELOR OF THE YEAR

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“There are so many ways you’re serving the children in the community. You’re working on multiple levels, doing work that meets the school’s overall goals as well as working with individual students. You feel like you’re reaching the whole student body, not just a few kids.”

— Fern Seiden '04C, 2008-2009 N.H. Elementary School Counselor of the Year



Fern Seiden (middle) with her parents Fran and Tom Wills at the Ed-dies Awards ceremony held in Manchester, NH in June, 2009. (PHOTO BY DEBBIE NORDYKE)

When the principal of Litchfield’s Griffin Memorial School announced at an assembly that **Fern Seiden '04C** had been named 2008-2009 N.H. Elementary School Counselor of the Year, Seiden says the students seemed just as excited as she was. “Five hundred some-odd cheering children is really fun—you can’t beat that,” she says.

When Griffin Memorial principal Bo Schlichter asked Seiden if he could nominate her, she accepted. Then she learned she had to submit 20 pages of evidence that she’d met the benchmarks for the award. Seiden had no trouble filling 20 pages; she says she found it hard to keep her application short. “I’ve been doing this for six years. Every year is different; you add things or change things,” she says. The process allowed her to reflect on how she’s

grown as a counselor and the factors that have influenced that growth.

Seiden cites Diane Minnis, her predecessor at Griffin Memorial School, as her first mentor, although the two women never met—when Seiden arrived at Griffin Memorial School in 2003, the community was mourning Minnis’ unexpected death. Seiden says that she learned a great deal by studying Minnis’ records. “From sticky notes left on lesson plans and an extensive library reflecting a curious mind, I learned about the habits of a great counselor and the value of school counseling.”

In her time at Griffin, Seiden has developed a comprehensive guidance plan including themes such as diversity, recycling, citizenship, goal setting, and more. She’s implemented a bullying prevention program, developed an environmental awareness program, presented a parent program on internet safety, worked with students to develop behavior plans, organized a child assault prevention program, and established several community partnerships. She’s definitely had a positive impact.

In addition to her background as a social worker, Seiden credits her experience at Rivier with preparing her to be an effective counselor. For example, she says a course on Response to Intervention has helped her lead her school’s Collaborative Assistance Team in developing positive, creative solutions to address student difficulties.

Seiden calls counseling a varied job. “There are so many ways you’re serving the children in the community. You’re working on multiple levels, doing work that meets the school’s overall goals as well as working with individual students. You feel like you’re reaching the whole student body, not just a few kids,” she says. ■