

SkillsUSA Spotlight

After another successful year of SkillsUSA competitions, the continually strong showing of our CATN students would not be possible without the hard work by many of our CATN staff members. As such, now that the 2019 Maryland State competition has concluded, it's a good time to recognize one of our staff members for their hard work and dedication to the students of CATN.

Dave Dolch is one of the Support Services teachers here at CATN. Dave has been with the school since 2013. Before arriving at CATN, Dave taught math at Chesapeake high school for ten years. As do the other Support Services teachers, Dave wears many hats here at the school, with duties ranging from serving as the school's math go-to-person, to teaching students employability skills, to assisting with training the school's Leadership competitors in preparation for the SkillsUSA State Competition.

By all accounts, Dave goes well beyond expectations in all of these areas, but none more so than his work with the Leadership competitors. In conjunction with a few of the other Support Services teachers, Dave works with students from the genesis of their presentation ideas all the way through to their end product, which is a 5-7 minute demonstration of a skill related to their content area or another area of interest. For about a five week period leading up to the State Competition date, Dave and his coworkers meet with each student anywhere from 3-4 days per week to develop the student's presentation, help create the props that will be used, and to generally support the students in any way they need as they prepare themselves for competition.

"Dave's work is critical," said Russ Cordua, the Support Services Department Chair and SkillsUSA Lead Advisor, "he's so talented and versatile. He's truly a jack of all trades. If a certain prop is needed, as one example, Dave has the ability to figure out a way to create it. Further, no matter the content area a particular student is competing in, Dave's breadth of knowledge allows him to provide valuable insight and direction as they prepare."

The work of Dave and his colleagues in the Support Services Department is evident – over the last three years, the Leadership competitors have earned a record number of medals in the State competition. Usually there's anywhere from 6-10 Leadership competitors. In 2017, three Leadership competitors won gold medals, two won silver, and one earned a bronze medal. This was the best showing for these competitors in any year stretching back well more than 12 years. In 2018, two won gold, one won silver, and one earned bronze. This year, out of the six total competitors, four medaled, with two winning gold, and two earning bronze.

However, Dave's work preparing for the State Competition extends well beyond his work with the students directly. "It's the extra things he does that really stands out," commented Mr. Cordua. "For example, the Support Services Department borrows a box truck from the county to pack and transport all of the Leadership Competitors' equipment and materials to the competition site early in the morning on the day of the competition. Dave is the one who volunteers every year to drive the truck," Cordua continued, "he arrives at the school at 6:15 a.m. in the morning (a Saturday morning) and drives the truck to the competition site long before the competitors arrive." The competition site this year for the Leadership contest was held at Soller's Point Technical High School in Dundalk, which meant that Dave had to drive the truck over the Key Bridge at the crack of dawn.

"It made me a little nervous," Dave admitted. "Last year the contest was held at Old Mill High School, " he said with a smile, "definitely a bit of an easier drive."

Some of the other "extras" Mr. Cordua is referring to are...

- Last year, Dave drove to a student's house late on the Friday evening before States to tape a mandatory permission packet to his front door (the student had not been able to turn it in previously). The student turned in the packet early the next morning, and promptly went on to win a gold medal. Without the completed packet, the student would not have been allowed to compete.
- Dave made a deal with a local fast food establishment to provide food to our State Leadership competitors each year.
- A student two years ago (2017) shucked oysters for his State presentation. Dave worked a deal with some local restaurants to provide him practice oysters at a very cheap price. Dave would often even go to the various restaurants on his own time to pick the oysters up for the student. Dave also had a plaque created for this student's employer (a local restaurant) to hang in their lobby after the student won a gold medal.
- When a student woke up late for this year's Regional competition and had to rush straight to the competition site without his equipment, Dave worked with the site staff to allow him to borrow the materials he needed to compete. When an item or two was still missing, Dave drove to the local Kmart to buy the extra items so the student could begin his demonstration.
- Dave secured gift certificates and donations from several local eateries for the State competitors.
- For the school's May Auto Show, Dave not only worked the Saturday event from 5:45 a.m. to 2:45 p.m., but he secured several donations for the event, came to the school for four hours on his own time on a prior Saturday (and another three hours on a Thursday evening) with Assistant Principal, Ryan Sackett, to help prepare the trophies.

It is because of teachers like Dave Dolch that schools can function at a high level for students. CATN is lucky to have him as one of our own. Thanks, Mr. Dolch!

