WEC's Marcell Branch named Education Support Professional of the Year

ST. PAUL, Minn., Nov. 16, 2016 – Education Minnesota is celebrating American Education Week by honoring Marcell Branch, a behavior intervention specialist at West Education Center in Intermediate District 287, as the 2016 Education Minnesota Education Support Professional of the Year.

Branch has worked in the district for four years. He spends his day making sure the level-four behavior school is safe and building connections with students.

“These kids need someone to be there when they do good and when they do bad,” he said. “I hold them accountable when I need to and celebrate their accomplishments, too.”

Branch has spent 13 years working with at-risk youth. Prior to working in public education, he was a case manager, counselor and advocate at various youth-based organizations. He is a certified gang specialist and won the Frederic Thrasher Award for Gang Prevention.

“We need to focus on the positive,” he said. “People can have things go on in their lives, but you don’t give up on them. Every day that you show up, that child is going to show up. We need to help the students realize that the work they put in is going to benefit them in the end.”

As the new Minnesota Education Support Professional of the Year, Branch will receive a new Apple iPad and a $1,000 honorarium. He will also be nominated for National Education Association’s ESP of the Year and will receive an all-expenses paid trip to Dallas for the awards ceremony in March.

“Marcell is known for his relentless optimism with students,” said Denise Specht, president of Education Minnesota, the award’s sponsor. “He knows ESPs are responsible for facilitating an atmosphere that makes learning possible in our classrooms. He is both a remarkable individual and an example of how important education support professionals are for preparing every student for a successful life.”

American Education Week, a national celebration of public education, runs from Nov. 14 through Nov. 18. Wednesday had been designated as Education Support Professionals Day to honor the women and men who keep schools running and students safe, healthy and ready to learn.

The winner of the Education Support Professional of the Year award is selected by a five-member selection committee that includes three leaders of Education Minnesota, the winner in the previous year and a representative of an external organization, which was United Educators Credit Union this year.

Branch is the second education support professional from Intermediate District 287 to win the award in the past three years. Cindy Brose, a paraprofessional, was the Education Minnesota Education Support Professional of the Year for 2014.