

Danielle M. Kovach, New Jersey City University, Class of 2010

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For New Jersey City University (NJCU) graduate alumna Danielle Kovach, winning the 2010-2011 New Jersey Teacher of the Year Award was an “unbelievable” experience. She met President Obama, shook his hand, and talked to him about her role as a special education teacher. He acknowledged the fact that she has a tough job. Danielle, who received an NJCU Master’s Degree in Educational Technology in 2007, acknowledges that although meeting the president was a once in a lifetime opportunity, it was not the highlight of her life. The best thing that has ever happened to her happens “all the time. That is spending time with my wonderful family – husband Mike and three sons Michael, Joseph and Ryan.”

Danielle, who lives in Succasunna, (Morris County) New Jersey, is a special education teacher at the Tulsa Trail Elementary School in the Hopatcong School District in Sussex County. In addition, she is the co-founder, alongside her husband, of a technology consulting company. This gives her the opportunity to share her expertise in technology with teachers around New Jersey. In addition, she is a professional development consultant for the New Jersey Education Association.

Her exceptional skills, commitment and passion for using technology to connect with and educate students captured the attention of NJCU President Sue Henderson, who asked her to give the university’s Academic Convocation in 2012 –the first time an alumnus/alumna was tapped for this honor.

That thrilling honor “was not the best thing that has ever happened to me,” said Danielle who got an NJCU Master’s Degree in Educational Technology in 2010. The best thing that has ever happened to her happens “all the time, not just one time. Aside from spending time with my wonderful family – husband Mike and three sons Michael, Joseph and Ryan – the best thing in my life is working everyday.”

“The NJCU graduate program appealed to me because it addressed my two loves – special education students and educational technology,” Danielle said. “The program not only provided the latest information in the field, but also provided flexibility with amazingly supportive faculty. These attributes were very crucial to me – I was working full-time, a mother of a young child, and pregnant with my second child at the time. There was an online component, plus in-person classes at satellite school technology lab in Hopatcong (where I teach). The coursework really gave me the tools to reach my students in ways that I never had done before. The relationships I made with my cohorts in the program and the instructors also have been invaluable. The department head, Dr. Cordelia Twomey, demanded excellence, but provided crucial support at all times. The NJCU program gave me the foundation to excel. I am still in touch with Dr. Twomey to share ideas and get her advice.”

Danielle has been sure she wanted to be a teacher of youngsters with special needs since she was 14 years old and volunteered at an ARC summer camp in Morris County. "My experience of working with special needs youngsters in summer camp was humbling and amazing. I was stunned by how smart and motivated the campers were in spite of their challenges and how much they could accomplish with the right teachers and techniques ... I knew then that I had to become one of those teachers."

Her determination unleashed the Energizer Bunny in her and she went forward to get her B.S. in Special Education and Elementary Education from Kutztown University, a Master's Degree in Special Education from East Stroudsburg University, a second Master's Degree in Educational Technology from NJCU, and now she is a Waldron University doctoral candidate pursuing an EdD in Special Education. In addition to being a special education teacher and educational technology guru, she also has designed a program to keep students safe from child predators. Called "Superheroes of Safety," her program was featured on an episode of an NJTV program, "Classroom Close-Up NJ."

Unfazed by the long list of awards and grants that have acknowledged her talents and commitment over the years, Danielle stays focused on "what counts in my life ... my family at home and my family in school."

Even though her family at home had nothing to do with her career choice, two of her three children are "special-needs kids ... instead of stressing me out, I am grateful that I have the knowledge and resources to deal with their needs. They have helped me become a better teacher."