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## Ohio Lt. Gov. Taylor visits Beacon School

By SARAH GUINN MESSENGER STAFF JOURNALIST 3 hrs ago



Messenger photo by John Halley

DD Supt. Kevin Davis and Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor share a moment with Sylvia Fields, who has worked at Walmart for the past eight years thanks to services provided through the DD Board. Here, Fields shows Taylor her PersonnelPlus Employee of the Year award.

Managers of the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities welcomed Ohio Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor to Beacon School for a visit Thursday afternoon in observance of Disabilities Awareness Month as well as the 50th anniversary of county boards.

Taylor said she came Beacon to learn about “all the great things they do.”

“I’ve found that if you’re open to the suggestions that you sometimes get to visit different programs and different things going on across the state of Ohio, you do really learn that there are some fantastic things and fantastic people working on things that matter to all of us and I’m really, really excited to learn what they do here,” she said.

Taylor joined a roundtable of the agency’s managers, which also included DD Board President Margaret Demko and Sylvia Fields who is an individual served by the DD Board and was named PersonnelPlus’ Employee of the Year at a banquet held last fall.

Although Taylor hasn’t made an official visit anywhere else in the state in terms of Disabilities Awareness Month, she said was interested to learn what Athens County is doing in terms of programming, how it’s working and if there are recommendations, changes or suggestions.

Taylor noted the current administration on the state level has been supportive of funding for disabilities, with an additional \$122 million planned in the upcoming biennium budget and 1,300 new waivers across the state.

During the round table discussion, Demko noted she is the parent of a child with a developmental disability and that her daughter is currently served on a waiver, which piqued Taylor’s interest.

Demko explained the waiver, which is funded through Medicaid using both state and federal dollars, allows her to have a private provider take care of her daughter particularly when it comes to after school activities while Demko would still be at work.

She also said a waiver could help her modify her home by adding a ramp in place of stairs, she said.

"It means a lot to have that opportunity," she told Taylor.

Fields also shared her story with Taylor, that she is of Native American heritage, and through PersonnelPlus, has maintained a custodial job at the Athens Walmart for about eight years. She was name Employee of the Year at the agency's banquet last fall.

Fields additionally presented Taylor with a Passion Works flower before concluding her visit.

DD Supt. Kevin Davis called Taylor's visit to the agency "very significant," given that she took time out of her schedule to be able to come.

"She was genuinely concerned about the issues affecting the county board on a statewide and federal level," he said. "She also expressed a great interest in the individuals we serve and their families by wanting to know what could be done at a state level that could help assist them in obtaining quality care and services."

Taylor's visit also gave the agency a chance to advocate for "a more sustainable, predictable, and flexible system of service delivery, which would allow county boards to financially plan and forecast into the future on a local level," he said. "It was also a chance to demonstrate to the Lt. Gov. how the Athens County Board of DD provides excellent services while being a good steward of taxpayer funds."

Taylor also toured the school's facilities before departing for the day.

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