

Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award

Mary Ann Ahearn

As program administrator for the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System, Mary Ann Ahearn holds both the past and the future of SIM in Florida in her hands. The keeper of the SIM flame in Florida since 2008, she upholds a more than 25-year tradition begun by Marty Beech and supported by many that she consistently brings to the table to advise and guide. Today, more than 200 professional developers support SIM in the classrooms of Florida's 74 school districts. Ahearn's job is to make sure the resources and structures are in place to continue this work.

"She has championed SIM at the state level, ensuring budget allocations are in place to hold an annual update and offering professional learning opportunities regionally across the state," says Patty Graner, director of professional development at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning and member of a Florida SIM advisory council established by Ahearn.

Ahearn is this year's recipient of KUCRL's Gordon R. Alley Partnership Award, which recognizes the vital role of partnership in successfully conducting large-scale research and development efforts. The award honors the legacy of Alley, one of the Center's founders and a master at mentoring the young and inexperienced assistant professors who

were assembled to conduct KUCRL's first research studies. Alley passed away in 1997 from complications from a serious accident several years earlier.

With Ahearn's support, Florida won a State Personnel Development Grant that supports the growth of SIM in targeted districts, and she led the development of a system for collecting data about professional learning, its implementation, and ultimately how it affects student learning.

"Her confidence, creativity, and compassion inspire each member of the Florida SIM Network to accomplish great things for educators, children, and families," says Alice Schmitges, a member (along with Sallie Payne) of Ahearn's SIM team. "She respects us as educators but deeply cares about us as people."

Marty Beech, who has worked alongside Ahearn for many years, says the Florida SIM network thrives because of Ahearn's leadership and the connections she makes between SIM and other statewide initiatives.

"Mary Ann is always available for counsel and direction," Beech says. "She will listen to what you have to say, ask the critical questions to help you think through the issues, and offer her assistance to resolve any issues."

Those who have met Ahearn recognize her commitment to going beyond

expectations to ensure everyone has the best experience possible.

“She’s a person of high integrity,” says Don Deshler, former director of KUCRL. “In my mind, that is the highest compliment that can be paid to anyone.”

Ahearn’s visionary leadership inspires those with whom she works

to constantly improve. Her enthusiasm has left its mark. Beech recalls Ahearn’s trademark style of making introductions at gatherings.

“She always says ‘Give it up for...’” says Beech. “So I’d like to say, ‘Give it up for Mary Ann and her constant support of the SIM network in Florida.’”

Mary Ann Ahearn

Manages each project with expertise and must not sleep for all that she accomplishes

Amazing organization with a flare—awesome details and special touches

Ready to celebrate the successes of others

Yes, I can do that” seems to be her modus operandi

Always respectful of others’ suggestions/work

Nourishes and inspires professionalism

Network facilitation is SIMsational

—Sandi Soper