PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Rachel DeNofio, a kindergarten teacher at Asa Messer Elementary School known as “Ms. D,” was named Providence Teacher of the Year during a surprise ceremony Thursday morning.

DeNofio lists her many classroom roles as “guide, nurturer, cheerleader, motivator ... and collaborator.”

“Teaching is my passion,” she said. “I take my role very seriously. It is an honor to lay the groundwork for a lifelong love of learning.”

DeNofio was one of the first teachers to introduce “blended learning,” a mix of traditional instruction and technology, into a city classroom. She now mentors other teachers in this practice in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

A parent, Stephanie Izzo, said Ms. D was nothing short of a lifesaver for her son, Thomas, who had difficulty adjusting to the classroom.

“At recess, he would stand alone with his head down,” she said. “In class, he was easily over-stimulated, sometimes banging his head on a desk, afraid to ask for help with simple tasks...”

DeNofio tailored a learning program to his needs.

A few months ago, Thomas asked his mother to buy him a shirt that said, “I Love School.”

“It was then that I realized that everything was going to be all right,” Izzo said. “I truly don’t know what we would have done had we not had Ms. D to guide us through our son’s first year of school.”

Principal Denise Missry called DeNofio’s classroom “a marvel,” adding, “Within the first two weeks of school, her kindergartners follow the established rituals and routines. It would seem that these 5-year-olds had been in the classroom all year.”

DeNofio has spent the past 11 years at Messer, where she has been praised for her dedication, her classroom innovation and her commitment to her families.

She earned a master’s degree in education from Rhode Island College, a bachelor’s degree in human development and family studies from the University of Rhode Island and an associate’s degree in early childhood education from the Community College of Rhode Island. She lives in Warwick.