

## CRITERIA FOR NOMINATING AN OUTSTANDING TEACHER OF THE YEAR

The Macomb County *Outstanding Teacher of the Year* awards are given annually to honor teachers who have achieved the highest standards of excellence in their profession. These awards are created out of a conviction that quality public education is essential to our community and that encouraging excellence in education is the shared responsibility of all who reap its benefits.

With national attention focused on all students meeting high standards, teacher quality is more important than ever. The most important mechanism a school has to ensure teacher quality is its evaluation system. The Macomb Intermediate School District uses Charlotte Danielson's **Framework for Teaching** theory as the cornerstone of the *Macomb County Outstanding Teacher of the Year* nominating and scoring process. We believe this system is research-based and provides a professionally meaningful system of teacher appraisal.

In Charlotte Danielson's book *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, she outlines measures relating to quality teaching organized into four domains, each with several components. These measures are:

- **Planning and Preparation** which includes comprehensive understanding of the content to be taught, knowledge of the students' backgrounds, and designing instruction and assessments.
- The **Classroom Environment** is concerned with the teacher's skill in establishing an environment conducive to learning, including both the physical and interpersonal aspects of the environment.
- **Instruction** is concerned with the teacher's skill in engaging students in learning the content, and includes the wide range of instructional strategies that enable students to learn.
- **Professional Responsibilities** includes a teacher's additional professional responsibilities, including self-assessment and reflection, communication with parents, participation in on-going professional development, and contributing to the school and district environment.

## NOMINATING TESTIMONY

**NOMINEE'S NAME:**            Elizabeth McMillan

**Please list the outstanding achievements and service demonstrated by the nominee during the last two years. In fairness to all, we ask that you limit your testimony to this assigned sheet and one additional blank sheet following.**

**A. Evidence of teacher's evolving knowledge of Planning and Preparation:  
*How does the nominee demonstrate his/her knowledge of content, pedagogy, students, instructional goals, and the design of coherent instruction? (25 points)***

Examples might include:

- Teacher's translation of instructional goals into meaningful learning experiences (i.e., adapting standards and benchmarks to their teaching, organizing and sequencing activities to engage students in learning and reflecting)
- Adjustment of instructional goals to accommodate the diversity represented by their students (i.e., knowledge of resources, varied approaches to learning, student interests and abilities)
- Use of assessment to inform the instructional process and plans for next steps (i.e., student feedback, reflecting on learning)
- Professional development in curriculum or in general teaching techniques

***Use only the space provided on this sheet and one additional blank sheet following***

Liz McMillan is a careful planner and is always prepared. She understands how planning and preparation are vital to good teaching and puts great thought into each of her lessons. Liz also realizes the need to be flexible and that sometimes the best laid plans need to be tossed out or revamped due to real world situations that need to be addressed. These real world situations can be local, national or world events that touch the lives of the children or they can be very personal concerns that can interfere with a child's ability to focus and learn without devoting time to the problem.

Liz has a talent for teaching instructional objectives with meaningful and relevant lessons. She displays extensive knowledge about the content she teaches. Her students will tell you her passion is social studies. She wrote a grant that allowed her to bring current events into her classroom. She ran a mock election last year to vote for governor. Liz provided other staff members with materials and ideas for the school-wide celebration of "Constitution Day." She helped her students gain a better understanding of the branches of government by allowing them to visually see how the branches of government "gel together." Liz made red and blue Jell-O for her students, mixed in cool whip, and discussed how the branches; J – Judicial, E – Executive, and L – Legislative all "JEL -LO" together. After attending training on the new literature genre units, Liz realized how well the fifth grade units connected to the social studies curriculum and promoted and encouraged the use of the units within the fifth grade.

She often ties literature to science and math as well to enrich and increase instruction. Liz also planned and organized a weeklong science camp for all 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes.

Her lesson plans include both objectives and benchmarks. They are organized and neat. Her materials support her instructional goals. She organizes lessons to deeply engage students and allows time for reflection and therefore, teaches her lessons smoothly with great energy.

Mrs. McMillan knows her students well. She is a master of recognizing the diverse makeup of her students and is able to plan her lessons based on their interests and experiences. Liz builds on both formal and informal assessment to guide her planning of instruction. She is very conscientious of her student's abilities. She adjusts her lesson plans to accommodate these differences by using differentiated instructional practices. She encourages her students to be decision makers. Mrs. McMillan holds high expectations for all of her students. Liz will spend her planning period, recess time, or lunchtime helping students complete assignments they are having difficulty with or have chosen not to complete. She refuses to accept, "I didn't do my work." Liz believes that when children choose to fail in school there is usually a far more serious matter for adults to consider. It is common for Liz to conduct a one-on-one meeting with such students with the intention of mentoring, guiding, and inspiring them to focus on goal setting, competence, organization, and success.

She attends professional development meetings to increase her knowledge in curriculum and teaching techniques. She uses best practices and seeks out resources to enhance instruction. Liz is always looking to be a better teacher. Liz is a strong believer in self-evaluation and takes a child's failure as an opportunity to re-evaluate her personal teaching strategies. When it comes to planning and preparation for teaching, Liz McMillan is superior. Liz believes that teaching is unlike any other job; that preparation is the foundation for success.

**B. Evidence of teacher's ability to establish a Classroom Environment:  
*How does the nominee build a respectful learning community where there is respect, safety, and high expectations for all students? (25 points)***

Examples might include:

- Existence of relationships grounded in respect, dignity, safety, and caring
- Strong culture of learning where everyone is engaged in pursuits of value on high-quality work
- Student pride in work
- Procedures for smooth operation of the classroom and the efficient use of time (i.e., management of classroom procedures, standards of conduct)
- Enhancement of the physical environment and use as a resource for learning

***Use only the space provided on this sheet and one additional blank sheet following***

Mrs. Liz McMillan has established a wonderful safe and engaging learning community in her classroom as a Mount Clemens' teacher. She creates this community through respect, high expectations, and a genuine caring for all. She respects each

student as a capable learner, which is reflected in student success, and the regard students have for her.

Mrs. McMillan provides a well-organized and safe learning environment. Students often express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions freely. Within her classroom, procedures are in place to support high expectations, academically and socially. Liz not only operates smoothly throughout her own classroom, but organizes many other important events, like the annual spelling bee and 5<sup>th</sup> grade science camp. The spelling bee takes countless hours of preparing children for the endless pressure of being in the spotlight and studying incredibly advanced words. Science camp is also organized by Liz with the same charismatic leadership skills. During science camp, students create and build on new experiences through scientific discoveries. It also promotes new social skills away from home.

Liz actively engages her students in speeches, plays, and other expressions of art. Last year Liz had her class do a choral reading that was taped and presented at a School Board Meeting. Students really enjoy her sense of humor and love of the curriculum. During the winter season, Liz created a “Winter Wonderland” in the 300 pod in which lower elementary students came to visit and enjoy the scenes. Students in the 300 pod were very excited for visitors to see their displays. They really felt a sense of importance and togetherness. Liz encourages and nurtures students’ self-confidence and it is reflected in the high quality of work that is shown throughout her classroom and hallways. Liz loves to display her students’ work. She feels that helps to build self-esteem.

Many of Mrs. McMillan’s students return often to visit with her sharing new life experiences. Liz also frequently receives emails and letters from former students. It is evident that Liz establishes a respectful learning community and that students feel a sense of pride, which carries beyond the classroom. Students and parents alike fondly speak of Liz. We are proud to have Liz represent our district, as she is one of the best advocates for lifelong learning in Macomb County.

### **C. Evidence of the teacher's evolving knowledge of Instruction:**

***How does the nominee promote student engagement in learning the content and which instructional strategies are used? (25 points)***

Examples might include:

- Communication skills (i.e., vivid and expressive language, quality of oral and written communication)
- The use of questioning and discussion techniques (i.e., elicits student reflection, framing questions of high cognitive challenge, use of questions to extend learning)
- Active construction of learning (i.e., intellectual involvement with the content, participation, problem-solving activities, student choice and initiative, use of higher-order thinking skills, learning designed to be relevant, diverse grouping strategies, use of instructional materials and resources, lesson structure and pacing)
- Provision of high quality feedback
- Demonstration of flexibility and responsiveness (i.e., sense of efficacy, commitment to the learning of all students)

**Use only the space provided on this sheet and one additional blank sheet following**

In regards to knowledge of instruction, Liz McMillan is extraordinary. Her ability to engage and motivate her students to think deeply, challenge themselves and be excited about learning is truly inspiring. If you walked into Mrs. McMillan's classroom you would notice numerous effects that make her stand out. Immediately you would feel a warm and safe environment where students are actively learning. All students would be engaged with the lesson being taught as they have followed procedures introduced and practiced for efficiency and effectiveness. They would be asking higher order thinking questions and Mrs. McMillan would be giving quality feedback. She would be encouraging students to problem solve and be self-motivated while targeting the metacognitive thought processes of her students. It would be obvious that the class was excited about learning and willing to share with visitors, as many frequent her classroom.

She understands the individuality of each child in her class and plans instruction accordingly. Diverse grouping such as leveled literature groups or differentiated instructional tiered lessons are just two strategies that Liz uses to help all of her students be successful. Students in Mrs. McMillan's class are thinkers. She challenges them to consider beyond the obvious and always asks "How" and "Why" to push for deeper understanding. She encourages her students to be choice makers and problem solvers.

Liz consistently evaluates her own program. She is able to assess her students' needs and plan her day around strategic interventions, small and whole group instruction, independent practice, and formative assessments. I have often seen Mrs. McMillan sitting quietly during lunch with one child going over a plan of improvement while encouraging the student to do her/his best. She brings the lessons alive for the child and does not think it is "extra" duty to go shopping for additional "props" to reach each child. Once after teaching about the Boston Tea Party, explaining its significance, and writing protest letters to the King of England, the children had their own "tea party." She served tea and biscuits to each child. Liz also had students make games that were played by Native American children and the Pilgrims during colonial times and expected the students to understand the significant of these cultural events in their respective historical eras.

On another observation, Mrs. McMillan was teaching a social studies unit on Columbus. Since her pedagogy is based on best practices, she makes connections for the children. She brought in snapshots from the Port Huron visit her family took to see one of Columbus' reconstructed ships. She shared the photos using her computer and LCD projector. She also used an Internet connection to give prior dimensions of the vessel and had children make discoveries about the size. This anticipatory set was quite effective for our urban eleven-year olds. The investigation of these famous ships helped to make history come alive for her students. She utilizes the discovery learning model often in her class. Lecture has its place, but not 100% of the time. Teachers, like Liz, realize the various ways children learn and are very industrious in presenting the lesson in varied modalities in order to maximize students' learning styles, intelligences, and skill sets.

Despite the fact that she is an experienced teacher, Liz spends countless hours preparing for each school day, practicing the delivery of her instruction, and reflecting on the results of the teaching and learning daily. She attends workshops, reads literature, and utilizes instructional materials to improve her knowledge of instruction. Liz is committed to staying current with research and implementing what works best for the students in her classroom. Her passion for quality is evident and the parents commend her willingness to extend her efforts beyond the school day for all students.

She is committed to the learning and well-being of each of her students and extends that commitment beyond the walls of her classroom to every student and staff member in the building. Her enthusiasm, kindness, and love for teaching are contagious and should be recognized.

**D. Evidence of the teacher's evolving knowledge of Professional Responsibilities:  
*How does the nominee reflect on his/her teaching and foster relationships with colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community? (25 points)***

Examples might include:

- Reflection (i.e., sensitivity to the engagement of students, accurate assessment of a lesson's effectiveness, use of reflections in practice)
- Maintaining accurate records (i.e., records of competencies, portfolios)
- Communicating with families
- Contributing to the school and district (i.e., collegiality, leadership, volunteering)
- Growing and developing professionally (i.e., professional organizations, conferences, local and state educational agencies, conducting research, supervising teachers, mentoring teachers)
- Showing professionalism (i.e., professional standards, advocacy)

***Use only the space provided on this sheet and one additional blank sheet following***

Mrs. McMillan is truly a professional in her field. She stays updated by attending several countywide initiatives and workshops including the rollout of the Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs). Liz is MLPP trained; attends all OEAA (MEAP) related in-services; is a liaison of the social studies collaborative team for Mount Clemens with the MISD; is a MSU student intern mentor teacher; MCEA teacher mentor; School Improvement Team member; Spelling Bee coordinator; Teacher of the Year candidate in 2005; and acting principal at Seminole Academy. She has also attended summer week long in-services in the Eight Step Process (Closing the Achievement Gap, Dr. Patricia Davenport); and also spent one week collaborating with a team of teachers and the principal to set up a school wide writing program for grades K-6 at Seminole.

Mrs. McMillan doesn't just "attend" meetings, but takes it one step further. After a planning session with the writing team, Liz would take sets of materials home to evaluate for her grade level. When back with the writing team, Liz would then have firsthand knowledge of the material. She would begin to share with others which way they could present to the staff the next steps to follow. "Who will do the 6-Traits+1 in-service for the upper grades next week?" "I will," chimes in Liz.

At the following “Workshop Wednesday” held in our building, our staff would watch Mrs. McMillan giving it her all to bring the writing concepts to life for them and their students. Because of her prepared and knowledgeable approach, teachers look up to her and follow her lead. Because of her dedication and passion for quality teaching, our writing scores have improved significantly. For example, a cohort group of fifth graders scored 51% proficient in writing in 2005. They were tested again this fall and the cohort in 2006 and scored 76% proficient! Closing the achievement gap is something that comes natural for Mrs. McMillan at Seminole Academy.

Mrs. McMillan responsibilities include leading a team of teachers on a weekly basis, in the 8-step process, an innovative approach to create lessons that match the Michigan Curriculum Frameworks and GLCEs. These benchmarks may be new to some in our profession, but for Liz the concepts are well known and put implemented in her classroom. You will find Mrs. McMillan making transparencies, gathering manipulatives, and reflecting with her team on how to approach lessons so children will gain understanding and be able to apply their knowledge in real life situations. All of these focus lessons are data-driven (MEAP, MAT8, classroom assessments). The weekly assessments that Liz and her team create are generated from the GLCEs. The children have a preview of what is expected of them at each grade level with these assessments and are placed in a 30-minute tutorial or enrichment lessons coordinated by Mrs. McMillan.

Mrs. McMillan is involved with the shared decision making of the school with this administration. She is a highly regarded member of the School Improvement Team (Teachers voted her to be on the SIT). She has volunteered to be on evaluation teams to visit other schools for accreditation. Liz is the one that teachers come to if they have a curricular or academic problem. She is readily available and never sends a staff member away empty handed. Her love and passion for teaching and learning is recognized in the educational field. She has a wealth of experience and shares her knowledge with her team and parents. Being a former administrator, Mrs. McMillan knows both sides of a teacher’s life. Since she began her career in Mount Clemens, her true passion was to return to the classroom. It is our benefit that she made this decision.

Parents often “request” their child to be assigned to Mrs. McMillan’s class. They recognize her fine expertise in the field and respect her professionalism. Liz can make the hard decisions, too. If a parent needs to be brought in to learn that their child needs improvement, Mrs. McMillan will follow through to work out a plan of success with the family. She relates to the parents her high expectations and holds children accountable.

I am pleased to share the fine qualities that Mrs. McMillan exhibits here at Seminole. The staff works very hard as a team to have high expectations for students. To nominate the same teacher within a three-year span is quite an honor!