DISTINGUISHED TEACHERS AWARDS

Celebrating Excellence

The Distinguished Teachers Awards Ceremony

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

4:00 - 5:30 p.m.

Western Middle School

Program

Welcome

Terry Starr-Klein

Principal, Western Middle School

Musical Selections

Greenwich Public Schools Festival Orchestra

Conducted by Mercy Vaillancourt

Program Introduction And Master Of Ceremonies

Angela Schmidt

Chair, Distinguished Teachers Awards Committee

Comments

William S. McKersie

Superintendent of Schools

Comments

Peter Tesei

First Selectman of Greenwich

Presentation Of 2013 Distinguished Teachers

Nominators of Recipients

Closing Comments

Leslie B. Moriarty

Chairman, Board of Education

Please join the Distinguished Teachers after the ceremony for a reception in their honor.



DISTINGUISHED TEACHERS AWARDS

The Distinguished Teachers Awards Committee, Inc. is a nonprofit organization established to recognize and celebrate excellence among the dedicated teaching staff of the Greenwich Public Schools. The Distinguished Teachers Awards Committee has worked on the selection process for this year's recipients for the last eight months. The committee selects the Distinguished Teacher recipients from nominations made by colleagues, administrators, parents, students and/or community members. The committee reviews the nominations and selects a maximum of six Distinguished Teachers based on the criteria outlined in the Nomination Packet. To be eligible, a nominee must be a full-time Greenwich Public Schools staff member who is a certified teacher. A nominee must have completed at least five years of teaching, three of them in Greenwich. The criteria for identifying a distinguished teacher include, among others, that he/she inspires enthusiasm for learning and academic excellence, elicits a high level of achievement from students in relation to their individual abilities, encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and demonstrates and continues to pursue a high mastery of subject matter and best practices for instruction. The six teachers selected this year personify the criteria of a Distinguished Teacher.

Distinguished Teachers 2013

CECILIA AITA
Central Middle School
Special Education, Grade 8

JENNIFER BENOIT
Greenwich High School
Special Education, Grades 9-12

MELISSA MACCHIO BROWN
Greenwich High School
English/AVID, Grades 9-12

STEPHEN KINNER
Eastern Middle School
Technology Education, Grades 6-8

ESRA MURRAY
International School at Dundee
Grade 5

MARY BETH SMITH
Greenwich High School
English, Grades 9-12

2012-13
Distinguished Teachers Awards Committee

Angela Schmidt, *Chair, GOSA*
Tammy Collins, *Vice-Chair, Community*
Susan Batcheller*, *Secretary*
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Cathy Delehanty, *GEA*
Trudi Durrell, *GOSA*
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Brenda Macri*, *Community*
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Margaret Santhanam, *Community*
Janet Stroble*, *Community*
Peter von Braun, *BOE*

Kim Eves, Ex-Officio

* Previous Recipients of the Distinguished Teachers Award

Nominators of Recipients

CHAY CAREY

Nominated Cecilia aita

REBECCA BACIGALUPO

Nominated Jennifer benoit

JULIE FARYNIARZ

Nominated Melissa Macchio Brown

LAUREN BUCKLEY

Nominated Stephen Kinner

VICTORIA NEWMAN

Nominated Esra Murray

CASSANDRA ECHEVARRIA

Nominated Mary Beth Smith



Cecilia Aita

Central Middle School
Special Education, grade 8

Parent Nominator Chay Carey notes that Ms. Aita is "professional, caring and connects with her students on a personal level. A committed teacher, she strives for excellence in all that she does for our children." Ms. Carey continues, "Ms. Aita advocates for (her daughter), but at the same time is always working to help her become a stronger self-advocate. She modifies course work for students with learning disabilities to accommodate their unique learning needs, but does not make excuses for the kids when they are not getting their work done. She holds them accountable for their own learning in all of their classes."

Ms. Aita continuously strives to identify best practices in instruction for her use with students and to share with colleagues. Her colleague and co-nominator Jennifer Bresler notes: "Cecilia has worked with so many teachers in collaborative classrooms successfully. Co-teaching can be an adventure given the diverse personalities of educators. Cecilia has gracefully navigated the professional relationships that co-teaching requires. As a result, her opinion is highly valued among staff. Anyone working with Cecilia will greatly benefit from her depth of knowledge of effective teaching strategies, as well as her patience and flexibility."

CMS Assistant Principal and co-nominator Jo Frame, herself a Distinguished Teacher, said, "Ms. Aita was instrumental in bringing a nationally recognized, research-based reading program to Central designed to meet the needs of struggling readers." Ms. Frame further attests that most of Ms. Aita's students have seen an increased level of reading achievement on

their CMT's. She piloted this program, which has now become an accepted part of the language arts program that serves both general education and special education students who score below goal in reading and writing on the CMT's. Ms. Aita's ongoing search for best practices most recently led her to attend the AVID Summer Institute, returning to CMS with a new set of effective instructional strategies, ready to share with colleagues.

Ms. Aita has been a leader in implementing the Data Team improvement planning structure at CMS. In addition to the District-wide training in the Data Team implementation, she attended Harvard University's DataWise training and was asked to return the following year to present to the next cohort. She and her team were commended at this Harvard workshop for strongly communicating their School Strategic Improvement Plan.

An educator for over thirty years, Ms. Aita taught at the Windward School in White Plains, NY from 1980 to 1997, as a Literature and English Skills teacher for grades 6-12. She also served as a Teacher Mentor and Cooperating Teacher, and as President of the School Improvement Team. She came to Greenwich and Central Middle School in 1997 as a Special Education Resource Room teacher. She co-teaches in English and Social Studies classes, and is the Learning Facilitator for her Special Education Team. She is the Co-Chair of the School Data Team and a TEAM Mentor and Evaluator. She has been involved in numerous School and District initiatives as part of committees including Data Teams, School Improvement Teams, TEPL, CMS Faculty Advisory Board, Middle School Special Education Task Force, and the Achievement Gap Design Team.

Ms. Aita received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English and Secondary Education from Herbert H. Lehman College (CUNY), Bronx, NY; a Masters of Arts in Teaching/Learning Disabilities from Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY; and her Educational Leadership Certification from Pace University, White Plains, NY.





Jennifer Benoit

Greenwich High School Special Education, Grades 9-12

Jennifer Benoit is simultaneously a general education teacher, a resource room teacher, the Program Associate, and a Special Education Learning Facilitator for the Comprehensive Support Program (CSP) at Greenwich High School. CSP is a "school within a school" at the high school, where students with "primary concerns in the social, emotional, and behavioral realms develop an awareness of how their thoughts and feelings impact their behavior, socialization and learning," according to Ms. Benoit's colleague and nominator Rebecca Bacigalupo. She continues, Jennifer "is committed to reach every child and to teach them to see the good in themselves and make positive choices about their life, education and future. Her patience and calm demeanor put students and colleagues at ease. Her knowledge of the community resources and service providers and consistent contact and collaboration with parents makes her invaluable to the GPS community. Jennifer puts students first and believes in their capacity to grow and learn."

One of Ms. Benoit's students notes, "Over the years I've watched her patience and understanding continue to grow with all of her students. She has touched the lives of so many people and taught us to get back on our feet when times are tough. You see, Jenn is not just a teacher. She is a friend, a friend who has the ability to teach us life lessons, and class lessons all at the same time."

Ms. Benoit says, "I firmly believe that every student wants to be successful no matter how "turned off" they might be. I greet them every day with a smile and the expectation that we will all be successful in class that day. This approach opens the door

for my students to take academic risks that they often have not had the self-confidence to do. When a sense of community is fostered in the classroom and students are accepted for who they are, everyone can relax and learn."

Ms. Benoit is a resident of Greenwich, a graduate of Greenwich High School and has been a special education teacher at GHS for almost thirty years, since 1984. As a teacher in the Comprehensive Support Program, she is both a general and special education teacher. She teaches World Themes, English, Art and addresses the expectations outlined in an IEP (Individual Education Plan) in a resource room setting. Ms. Benoit is also the Program Associate for CSP, coordinating and overseeing the program, staff, and student discipline needs. She is a Learning Facilitator for the Special Education Department at GHS and a member of the CSP Instructional Data Team. She coordinates and facilitates ongoing reviews of the program and professional learning for her staff. Expecting students to take responsibility for their own learning is a focused objective for CSP. Ms. Benoit leads Level Reviews at CSP, ongoing meetings with students to assist them in self-evaluating, setting goals, identifying strategies to achieve the goals, and monitoring their progress. Most recently, they have designed and implemented a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) plan to improve student achievement.

Ms. Benoit received a B.S. in Sociology/Anthropology from Denison University, Granville, OH in 1979 and a Masters in Special Education from Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT in 1984.





Melissa Macchio Brown

Greenwich High School
English/AVID, Grades 9-12

Melissa (Missy) Macchio Brown is an English teacher, the first AVID Elective teacher, and Cantor House Assistant Dean at Greenwich High School. One of Ms. Brown's AVID students speaking at a recent AVID event said, "[I have] a great connection with my AVID teacher, Mrs. Brown, who I honestly consider to be the best teacher I've ever had because of her strong consideration for her students. Without my AVID family, I would not be where I am today, an admitted college student. I realize how much AVID has to offer, from tutorials and homework help, to simply the open arms of everyone. Responsibility for my own actions and my own future became the key in the way I now think." This same student described her initial dreams of going away to college as something that "seemed as difficult as trying to hold a cloud in my own hands."

Missy Brown is the first AVID (Advancement Through Individual Determination) teacher at GHS. Initially funded and continuously supported by grants from the Greenwich Alliance for Education (GAE), AVID is a four-year elective course that prepares students in the 'academic middle' for college, often the first in their families to attend. Ms. Brown has acted as teacher and mentor for the first cohort of AVID students at GHS. Now, four years later, these sixteen students are all heading to college. Fifteen of the sixteen have been accepted to date and have received over $250,000 in merit-based scholarships. The sixteenth student's acceptance is anticipated pending a delayed application process.

According to Julie Faryinarz, Ms. Brown's Nominator and

Executive Director of the GAE, "Achieving these impressive results has required considerable dedication, planning, and work outside of the school day for Missy. She has taken her students and interested peers on field trips to visit nine colleges. She regularly dedicates extra hours every week to helping her students, before and after school and during her opens." She and her colleagues developed a Summer Workshop designed to support rising AVID seniors in the college application process. GHS Headmaster Chris Winters continues, "She taught them the AVID curriculum – a rich assortment of study skills, character-building tools, and leadership strategies – and she instilled in them that no challenge is too great. She monitored their progress. She brought them to various events to speak about their goals and dreams. She stood by them when they struggled with academic and personal issues. As these students now approach the end of their GHS journey the results are extraordinary."

A teacher at GHS for nine years, Ms. Brown is also Cantor House's first Assistant Dean, a position introduced to GHS in 2011. Mr. Winters describes, "Again, Missy has been a trailblazer. She and the other four Assistant Deans took a vague job description and shaped it into a powerful game-changer for students.....They took student discipline and refocused it from a system based on punishment to one built around positive adult-student connections." Mr. Winters goes on to describe Ms. Brown as an English teacher, "whether it be a low level support class for the struggling learner or the high powered Shapers of the World class for honors-level seniors, Missy makes the connections necessary for every student to unlock his or her full abilities. Quite simply, she helps students achieve beyond what they ever thought they were capable of achieving."

Ms. Brown received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English from Providence College in Providence, RI in 2002, and a Masters of Science Degree in Secondary Education from the University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT in 2004.





Stephen Kinner

Eastern Middle School Technology Education, Grades 6-8

One of Stephen Kinner's students and co-nominators said, "Mr. Kinner is an outstanding teacher and expects 110% effort from each student. He inspires us by never giving up on any student. In his mind students can always work to their full potential. He says just because a student shows bad behavior doesn't mean that they are a bad person or student....he knows how to make a positive connection with all of us."

Mr. Kinner's objective is to transform Technology Education from an abstract subject into a hands-on experience. This experience transcends the course curricular objectives, and makes connections with other academic disciplines, with every-day life, with personal goals and with service to the community. Mr. Kinner notes, "Each lesson inspires [the students] to reach a little further, learn a little more independently, and bring out their natural curiosity and abilities to other aspects of their academic career. In every evolution, critical thinking and problem solving are involved, I constantly challenge my students to apply all of the academic and technological tools they have at their disposal to solve real-world practical problems."

EMS Assistant Principal and co-nominator Joanna Savino explains, "As a direct result of Steve's instructional strategies, students become better collaborative group members open to taking more risks. After Superstorm Sandy, Steve created a lesson where students would have to brainstorm what technologies would be needed to rebuild areas of Staten Island. Some students' projects tackled restoring communication through wireless devices, while others focused on what machines were

needed to demolish and rebuild sections of Breezy Point. The end of the lesson focused on what students could do to help out the devastated communities. Students left the class inspired to collect supplies for the clean up effort or perform chores to raise money for the Red Cross."

Ms. Lauren Buckley, colleague and nominator, said, "What has impressed me the most is that Steve will take on some of our more challenging students who sometimes do not feel great about their academic achievement for various reasons and keep them for a full year, making them a "teacher's aide" for the 2nd semester. In this way, he shows the student that he or she is capable of greatness and that they can be successful as well as a role model in his classroom."

After twenty years in the United States Coast Guard (1976-1996), with his last assignment as Commanding Officer in Portland, ME, and continuing his education, Mr. Kinner came to Eastern Middle School in 2001 as a Technology Education teacher. In addition to his work in the classroom, Mr. Kinner works with staff and students to build the sets for the school's annual musical. He is one of the Advisors for the schools' Environmental Action Club, and volunteers his time as an official for the EMS home track meets.

Mr. Kinner received an Associates Degree in Forestry from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, Amherst, MA in 1971; a Bachelors of Science Degree from Charter Oak State College, New Britain, CT in 2000; a Masters of Science in Education from Walden University in 2009, and his K-12 Technology Education Certification from Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT in 2002.



Esra Murray

International School at Dundee, Grade 5

Esra Murray is a master at personalizing the learning environment for her students. She uses small group instruction and technology adeptly to facilitate her efforts to create this environment. In addition, as Ms. Murray describes, "I see myself as the cheerleader who fosters my students' love of learning, a process that never stops. My students are unique individuals, full of potential. I begin the year with formal and informal assessments to gather data from students and their families. I gain a sense of their individual strengths and attributes, and create a chart to visualize opportunities to fill in gaps, to build and to extend. I work with my students to set realistic goals with concrete steps. Working in small groups and one-on-one, I facilitate their learning. We take moments to stop and reflect at milestones. I give explicit feedback, highlighting each achievement. I help them name what they mastered, and work on creating the next steps."

Ms. Murray's Principal and co-nominator Teresa Ricci describes Ms. Murray's approach to working with a student that struggled in reading. A 'reserved and unassuming' student, he blended in well with the others, but had not yet made his mark. Ms. Ricci said, "Through Ms. Murrays tenacity, one-on-one instruction and quiet cheerleading, his self-esteem soared and manifested, in his case, in the area of math. He blossomed in this area under Ms. Murray's tutelage and left fifth grade qualifying for pre-algebra." Ms. Murray, her colleagues, and parents alike attest to her clear belief in working with parents and families as partners in the education process. Ms. Ricci continues, referring to the same student, "This tutelage was done in concert with the

student's parents. Through ongoing communication, Ms. Murray collaborated with parents in establishing a school/home team for the purpose of working toward a common goal."

Ms. Murray's love of learning and innate inquisitiveness provide for enriching professional collaboration. Her colleague and co-nominator Fred Stewart, also a Distinguished Teacher, describes Ms. Murray's "combination of experience, education, knowledge, and intelligence a rare find." She is a "powerful force in grade level planning" and her "understanding of how students process information facilitates learning in her classroom." She takes existing curriculum units and finds "the unusual angle that makes the units more interesting to teach and that create maximal educational value for the students." Victoria Newman, parent and nominator, describes one such unit, "I remember when the students studied Pumpkinology: the study of Math and Science using Pumpkins! While their hands were mushy and soggy, the class learned about Circumference, Prediction, Difference, Range, Median, Mode, Survey for data and graphing data AND they had a lot fun doing it!"

After eight years working in marketing in the private sector, Ms. Esra began teaching at Carrie E. Tompkins Elementary School in Croton-on-Hudson, NY in 2005. A graduate of an International Baccalaureate (IB) high school (United Nations International School) herself, Ms. Murray came to Greenwich's first IB World School, the International School at Dundee (ISD) in 2009 as a fifth grade teacher. In her four years at ISD, she has participated on the School Data Team and the School Improvement Team. She has worked with a team at ISD to roll out the GPS Safe School Climate District Norms to the school community, and has develop and led professional learning activities on integrating technology into classroom instruction.

Ms. Murray received a B.S. in Applied Economics and Management from Cornell University, Ithaca, NY in 1997, and a M.S. in Early Childhood and Childhood Education (K-6) from Fordham University, New York, NY in 2003.



Mary Beth Smith

Greenwich High School
English, Grades 9-12

Mary Beth Smith's colleague and nominator Cassandra Echevarria describes Ms. Smith, "a natural leader," "in command of her subject matter," "her expertise and organization is a gift to her students," "a consistent role model and support-giver," "she goes above and beyond for her school and community." Ms. Echevarria continues, "Some teachers just rise above the rest. They embody the true spirit of what an educator should be. They are an inspiration to their students, to their peers, and to everyone that has the good fortune to know them. Mary Beth Smith is one of these teachers."

Ms. Smith is adept at teaching academically at-risk students with the same passion and compassion as she teaches honors and AP courses, seamlessly moving from one to the other in the course of a day. As her nominator states, Ms. Smith conveys the belief that, "all students can learn and all students matter." She has consistently worked to improve curriculum and instructional best practices for struggling learners through the Community Learning Program, Skills for Success summer course, and the Saturday CAPT Academy.

Ms. Smith's colleagues and AP English students all highlight the 'Wall of Wonder' as a memorable learning experience. Ms. Smith's students create visual and written responses to demonstrate and defend the essential idea of the author, Lewis Caroll, in his book Alice in Wonderland. Student comments regarding this experience include, "'wall of wonder' helped me see that my opinions and input are valuable," "I found a greater appreciation for my classmates...we all worked together

to get as much of our points of view compiled together into one logical thesis," "This process fostered the kind of free intellectual dialogue that English classes have been preparing us for since middle school."

One of Ms. Smith's previous AP English students commented, "I began the year (in her class) both apprehensive of the class's rigor and entirely certain that I knew everything there was to know about writing. After receiving a C+ on the first assignment, I realized just how wrong I was. It takes a lot to communicate through the ego of a high school senior, because, seriously, who doesn't know everything by 18? It took a couple of weeks for our class to realize, for lack of a better phrase, that Mrs. Smith wasn't out to destroy us, she was going to teach us how to think."

Ms. Smith began teaching in San Francisco in 1984. After returning to the East Coast, she taught for three years at Lincoln Hall School, a school for adjudicated boys in Lincolndale, NY. She came to Greenwich High School in 1992 as an English teacher. In the twenty-one years she has been at GHS, she has been a Learning Facilitator for the English Department, redesigned and developed curriculum for the Community Learning Program, and redesigned and implemented the Summer School Skills for Success program. A teacher of teachers, she is a Mentor, a TEAM Reviewer, and a trainer of student teachers. She has run the Saturday CAPT Academy for the last four years and is an Instructional Data Team leader at the high school having attended Harvard's DataWise workshop. She is also a guest lecturer at Fairfield University for a course on young adult literature for prospective teachers.

Ms. Smith received a B.S. in English and Education from the University of Vermont, Burlington, VT in 1983, and a M.S. from San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA in 1989.

The Distinguished Teachers Awards Committee wishes to thank the following for their generous contributions:

Greenwich Organization of School Administrators (GOSA)
Kiwanis Club of Greenwich
PTA Council
Central Middle School PTA
Eastern Middle School PTA
International School At Dundee PTA
Julian Curtiss School PTA
North Mianus School PTA
North Street School PTA
Old Greenwich School PTA
Parkway School PTA
Riverside School PTA
and
Members of The Distinguished Teachers Awards Committee (DTAC)

Distinguished Teachers 1985 - 2012

2012
Christine Begole
Andrew Bramante
Richard Kurtzman
Elizabeth Manning
Barbara Brennan Oxer
Cynthia Sherwin

2011
Karen Boyea
Meredith Daniels
Laura Donnelly
Karen Foster
Nan Nelson
Jennifer Preli

2010
Alison Allerton
Jessica Baker
Rita Baker
Charill Pierce
Kathleen Steiner
Sheri Lyn Wollard

2009
Gretchen Crandall
Kathleen Harbort
Anne Haymon
Aaron Hull
Susan Tracey
Judith Wren

2008
Karen Anderson
Rita Clair
Camille Fusco
Arianne Haley-Banez
Christine Kovac
Anthony Mullen

2007
Phyllis Dale
Karen Maher-Cochran
Mary Ann Murray
Christina Shaw
Gloria Sprigg
Dana Tulotta

2006
Nan Barrett
Liz Black
William Bogardus
Charles DiSapio
Karen Harris
Robert Wilson

2005
Mary Fike
Diane Garofalo
Cathy Mayo
Gene Schmidt
Patrick Taylor
Julie Wang

2004
Andrea Abbott
Rae Baczek
Elaine Casale
Karen Nagy
Alice Neal
Jonathan Smith

2003
Donna Conway
Mark Epstein
Courtney Hawes
Brenda Macri
Karen Riordan
Medard Thomas

2002
Margot Bittenbender
Jean Di Vincenzo
Mariko Iwai
Georgia Tedla
Curtis Tipton
John Whalen

2001
Michael Batcheller
Alisa Lewis
Jane Niwa
Kathryn Onofrio
Susan Whalen
John Yoon

2000
Susan Batcheller
Valerie Bolling
Barbara O'Neill
Francis Pierce II
Susan Striker
Louise Williamson

1999
Kenneth Alcorn
A. Ray Hamilton
Patricia Kohn
Frederic Stewart
Carole Tierney
Doreen Zahn

1998
Nancy-Anne Fitzgibbons
Ledell Mulvaney
Mary Pierce
Barbara Schutzman
Steve Rosenberg
Judith Fell Woods

1997
Emma Oberheuser
Susan Valenzi
Dwight Wall
Erica Wiberg
Joanne Zammit
Robert Zapor

1996
Christine Anderson
Joan Beiser
William Dinnean
Carolyn Gilbert
Barbara Gotch
Carol Sutton

1995
Daniel Barrett
Anne Gilhuly
Chris Kazanas
Susan Lickwar
Judith Petersen
Caralliene Westbrook

1994
Frank Arnone
Lissa Bentley
Victor Mazmanian
Paul Rosenblum
Marcie Schoenfeld
Jerry Snyder

1993
Jory Lockwood
Gail Montgomery
Philip Nobile
Sara Reilly
Candace Robinson
Janet Stroble

1992
John Boyton
Jane Carlin
Susan Hart
Dena Phelps
Carmel Signa
Martha Taylor

1991
Brigid Barry
William Bechem
Elinor Carr
Richard Kohn
Jane Kahn
Camilla Rogers

1990
Joan Lowe
Terrence Lowe
Julie Machen
Mary Seitzer
Lee Spong
Steve Wallerstein

1989
Joel Adelberg
Dolores Kenny
Ralph Pettie
Richard Piotrzkowski
Carol Rosenberg
Ardith Williams

1988
Martha Awdziewicz
Carmelita Brooks
Marjorie Klar
Harry Kropp
Kenneth Lyon
Lorraine Termini

1987
Esther Bushell
Christine Gunn
Jeanette Hotchkiss
George Mathes
Anne Modugno
Harold Trachtenburg

1986
Elizabeth Hughes
Shirle Jankowich
Mary Livezey
Marilyn Maxwell
David Ross
Lynn Washington

1985
Ellwood Autuori
Kathy Barnes
Josephine Frame
Lois Hebert
Barbara Lewis
Betsy Perna-Smith

Criteria for Identifying Distinguished Teachers

- Inspires enthusiasm for learning and elicits a high level of achievement from students in relation to their individual abilities
- Expects students to take responsibility for their own learning
- Demonstrates and continues to pursue a high mastery of subject matter and best practices for instruction
- Has the respect of students and colleagues
- Communicates well with parents and students
- Collaborates with others and contributes to curriculum and program development to improve overall student achievement
- Contributes to the school, and/ or community beyond the classroom





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