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## **Odalis interviews Jennifer Stevens**

### **Introduce yourself and tell me about yourself.**

I am a dedicated and passionate high school photography and art teacher and have been teaching for 20 years. My goal is to inspire students to explore their creativity and develop their technical skills in photography; problem-solving and critical thinking skills that can be used in the real world. I believe in the power of art to transform lives and help students express their unique perspectives.

### **What is special about Norwalk High School/Norwalk Public Schools?**

Norwalk High School is special because of its support of the arts that foster creativity, critical thinking, and innovation.

### **Tell me a time you were proud to be an educator.**

I was particularly proud to be an educator when one of my students won a scholarship to the Hallmark Institute of Photography. Seeing the student's hard work, creativity, and dedication being recognized was incredibly rewarding. It reinforced the impact that guidance and encouragement can have on a student's artistic development and confidence.

### **Do you ever find yourself having any challenges? How do you deal with it?**

Yes, like any educator, I face challenges such as keeping students engaged, addressing diverse learning needs, and managing time effectively, but the biggest challenge to education today is the allowance of cell phones in school. Cell phones lead to excessive screen time, which can negatively impact their mental health, sleep patterns, and academic performance. Not only do they distract students from learning, but cell phones contribute to a significant rise in anxiety among today's youth. I collect them in the beginning of each class, but, unfortunately, they are used excessively throughout school.

### **Who is your hero? Who is your teaching inspiration? Why?**

My grandfather was a huge influence and inspiration to me. As a child, I spent hours in his studio creating every kind of art one can imagine. This led me to learn the importance of encouraging students to think critically and creatively, which are principles I strive to uphold in my classroom.

### **How do you take care of your mental health?**

To take care of my mental health, I weight train and exercise daily and eat a healthy vegetarian diet. I will also be found walking my dog Peanut when I am not at school.