

Dawn Oswalt

It is such an honor to be nominated and selected as WACH Fox's and the SCEA January Teacher of the Month! Helping students learn about the world we live in is both exciting, rewarding and has created in me a life-long passion for helping students reach their potential. Simply put, I love teaching. Hands down, I have the best job in the world! There is nothing more exciting than going to school each morning to see the children I work with throughout the week. I am honored to work with and learn beside them every day. They really want to discover the world and their place in it. What a privilege to see their gifts, talents and motivation for learning unfold before my eyes! No day is ever the same and it makes for quite an exciting career.

I attended Lexington Richland School District Five schools as a student and I credit District Five for inspiring me to teach from the heart. From a young age I always knew I would be working with kids. I graduated from the University of North Carolina @ Wilmington with a B.A. in elementary education. In 2006, I became a National Board Certified Teacher. In 2007, I studied at the University of South Carolina and earned a Masters in Educational Administration and Supervision. In 2009 I returned to the university and became accredited to teach the academically gifted. This year I will be renewing my National Board Certification and look forward to the challenge and learning opportunities the renewal process provides.

I have spent the majority of my 20-year career teaching in Lexington Richland School District Five. Currently I teach fifth grade at Oak Pointe Elementary. I simply love the ten and eleven year olds I work with. I enjoy watching the transition from child to pre-teen as the year unfolds. The student's independence grows substantially during this year and getting them ready for the educational, social and emotional elements of middle school can be both joyful and tearful as they move forward along their path. It is especially hard knowing my students won't be in the same building with me the following year. Many, however, stop by to visit or send me a quick e-mail telling me how they are doing. I am now hearing about the many different career paths my former students have taken.

Presently I am working under the district and alongside Dr. Tammy Pawloski on a study of children of poverty. I am investigating through an action research project how to assess and address children's emotional and social needs. Poverty does not necessarily mean economics. It can be any area in which a child is lacking. I believe educators need to extend beyond student's academic needs and place a great deal of emphasis on instructing, modeling, and coaching students as they work through personal issues. It was amazing to me to discover just how much students today have on their mind. I think as adults we sometimes hold onto the misconception that life as a child is relatively easy. However, if you have an open heart and a responsive ear, children are eager to accept guidance relating to their personal situations. I firmly believe that until we meet the emotional needs of each child, learning takes a back burner in the student's life. Like adults, when children are dealing with stressful situations it makes it virtually impossible for them to focus on learning the curriculum for the day. Each day I ask students to give me a thumbs up or down to quickly assess which students have a need beyond their classroom instruction. Most of the time a quick two-minute conference is all it takes to recognize a child's internal struggle. In addition, a mailbox resides in my room where students and I communicate about anything they have on their mind. My hope is that our policy makers will begin to acknowledge the variables that make up a child's life. Students don't come to us in a "one size fits all" to school each day. They have unique needs that change from day to day and sometimes hour to hour. Providing them

with an outlet and teaching them how to meet their personal needs is the crowing jewel of why I love teaching the most. My ultimate goal is to teach students how to advocate for their personal needs so life is both rewarding, fulfilling and productive.