



Congratulations to Oak Ridge Schools Teachers of the Year

The Teacher of the Year program recognizes and honors outstanding teachers in Tennessee. The Tennessee Department of Education staff applauds teachers who care about children, who devote their professional lives to enriching the lives of Tennessee students, and who demonstrate exceptional gains in student achievement. As part of this process in Oak Ridge, we seek teacher candidates from each school in our district. Please join us in congratulating the district-level winners nominated by their peers for the 2022-2023 awards cycle. Written in their own words and excerpted from their full applications, the following narratives provide a window into each one's authenticity and commitment to our students.

Oak Ridge Schools PreK-4 Teacher of the Year: Gary Grimac (Willow Brook Elementary School)

I remember when I first came to Oak Ridge Schools and I wrote my biography on the school's webpage. I had a parent tell me, "I read your biography. I told Trey, [his son] you got 'old school'." I suppose that I'm a little "old-fashioned." I understand that education is changing; people are changing. With that in mind I have had to change too. I am rapidly trying to keep up with the younger teachers and the technology movement. I certainly know it's the future. However, I don't think we should "throw out the baby with the bath water" - abandon older practices. As a result, I have been dedicated to taking five minutes out of my math block about once a week to give a 5-minute, 100-fact Multiplication Test. I believe it's important to grow students' memory.



School culture is the most important dynamic of any school or business. Several years ago, at Willow Brook, we were asked to work in teams to address an area that we believed we could make a change. I saw student discipline as the problem. Teachers were constantly putting out the fires of disruptive, nonacademic behavior. It wasn't that Willow Brook wasn't a great school, or that teachers weren't working hard; it was the fact we didn't have a collective, culture that allowed all that's good about our students, staff, and practices to be accentuated. After several years the culture is finally changing.

We are continuing to tweak PBIS as it evolves at W.B. It is changing so that we can streamline students needing intervention more quickly. I believe that the speedy response we are seeing has greatly changed the culture of our school. Students are rewarded for their good behavior and they have learned that poor choices have consequences. The culture has shifted; academics and good citizens' behavior are the focus.

Oak Ridge Schools 5-8 Teacher of the Year: Amy Fuqua (Robertsville Middle School)

As part of the math department I utilize the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum. This curriculum provides rigor and incorporates research-based instructional routines. While making plans for daily instruction, I focus on the PLC question: What do I want all students to know or be able to do? After providing tier 1 instruction each day, students complete a short exit ticket. This short assessment provides me with immediate feedback. I can then use this feedback to meet with students individually or as a small group in order to provide direct instruction or correct any misconceptions.

With my math PLC partner, I then create a common formative assessment and administer the assessment after approximately five to eight days of instruction. After administering the assessment, my collaborative team looks at the data and focuses on the guiding question: How will we respond if students are not proficient? At this point, I make a choice to either provide a reteaching opportunity or recommend students for tutorial.





When it comes to connecting students with the real-world in math class, I am lucky that our curriculum makes tremendous connections outside the classroom. Within each unit of study, I provide examples for students regarding how the skill can benefit them outside of school. By making those connections, I see my students focusing more on the importance of math skills.

Oak Ridge Schools 9-12 Teacher of the Year: Julie Golden (Oak Ridge High School)

The world language classroom is the perfect setting for differentiated instruction. I use a variety of instructional methods to teach each language function. When teaching a new grammatical concept, I may choose a popular, authentic song in the target language that repeats the new phrase that students are learning and piques student interest. I also may incorporate a kinesthetic activity in which students have a word or letter in a sentence and they must collaborate to physically form out the target phrase, while I am monitoring and giving feedback. Students may be tasked to ask each other questions that prompt the target response and then share that response with the class. Students who need more time can practice at a more basic level, while those who have mastered the main concepts can now add more details to their work. Overall, students will be challenged to practice the same language concept in a variety of ways before they are formally assessed. After multiple practice activities, students feel confident in their ability to use the language on that learning target.



Often, I try to create a physical classroom environment that matches the content that we are learning. During the unit on shopping, I create a store in the classroom and the students practice bartering and requesting items in Spanish as they shop. While studying airline travel, since many of my students have never been on an airplane, I bring the airport to my classroom. Students converse with airline employees as they check in for their flights, with TSA agents as they pass through security, and with customs agents in their destination. When studying art, our hallways become a museum, where students are asked to examine and discuss the artwork. These scenarios bring life to the learning and allow students to see the opportunities in which they can use classroom experiences and learning and apply them to real-world opportunities outside the classroom.

Oak Ridge Schools Teacher Assistant of the Year: Lauren Van Fleet (Jefferson Middle School)

As a teaching assistant, I have the privilege of serving in my fellow teachers' classrooms. From my observations, I have learned the best practices for effective teaching. I am a Master's in Initial Teacher Licensure Candidate at Lincoln Memorial University. I developed and taught a lesson plan based on a 7th Grade Life Science standard. I created a jigsaw activity to achieve my lesson objective, then in teaching groups, students worked together to develop and construct a cell model.

The students were able to accomplish the lesson's learning objective. Students at all levels of learning (including those with IEPs/504s and students on a proficiency scale of 3 or 4) said the lesson was fun and engaging. Overall, this jigsaw review activity improved students' confidence in their understanding of this standard and objective and was an effective review of cell organelles because it engaged a variety of learning styles and allowed students the opportunity to teach one another, contributing to a deeper learning for all students.





Oak Ridge Schools Principal of the Year: Dr. Garfield Adams (Oak Ridge High School)

I am excited and blessed to return to my hometown of Oak Ridge, TN. Oak Ridge is near and dear to my heart. It is an honor and privilege to serve at my alma mater, Oak Ridge High School. Working with such exceptional faculty and staff has been a true joy. We are also extremely blessed to live and work in an amazing community with extraordinary students.

Growing up in Oak Ridge was an experience that I wish all children could have. I spent several hours on the basketball court and many late afternoons on the football and baseball field. Although my courses were rigorous, I was beyond prepared for my college journey. The friends I made at Robertsville Middle School and Oak Ridge High School, have lasted over three decades. Although my parents and brothers have moved away over the years, they have found themselves right back home in Oak Ridge, TN. My wife and I; however, have never left. This has been home to us and our family. This is where we met, married and have raised our family in a wonderful community. There's something about this place that is truly unique and special.

I relish the thought of watching my children grow up in Oak Ridge and experience the life that I once lived. I also enjoy the thought of all our children experiencing the unique offerings that Oak Ridge Schools have to offer and the commitment our community has invested in our youth and families over the years. I'm excited about giving back to my community as were the opportunities extended to me.

