

Natalie Wester

2010
Ohio
Teacher
of the Year

Ohio | Department
of Education

“Engage. Empower. Expect. In our ideal future, all of our children would enter excellent schools as eager, prepared students ready to learn on a level playing field. They all would graduate as high-achieving, rigorously educated problem-solvers ready to excel in a global marketplace. This can start today with engagement, empowerment and high expectations – for students and teachers.”

– Natalie Wester



Philosophy of Teaching

I have a staunch belief that believing in children's genius will change their lives.

My contribution to education is the creation of an uncompromising, high-standards and high-expectations learning environment that fosters in each and every child an unwavering confidence and belief in their own absolute genius. A learning environment that incubates and empowers real-life problem-solvers and risk-takers by nurturing and releasing their authentic imaginations.

Empowering children as participants in their own learning and growth also is a central belief that impacts my work as a teacher. I believe in fostering a sense of ownership in the learning process and outcomes. In my classroom, students understand and communicate what they are learning and why.

Believing in children, empowering them, and exciting and engaging them by stimulating their imaginations are key to my teaching philosophy. Educator and philosopher Maxine Greene's book *Releasing the Imagination* inspires my interaction with students on a daily basis. A homemade sign that reads "Caution: Imaginations on the Loose" hangs inside our classroom doorway to remind us all – students and teacher – to reach for it. When students are encouraged to think creatively and imagine all possibilities, their excitement builds and interest grows. They become engaged as exuberant participants for whom learning is irresistible.

A Leader in School and Community

Natalie Wester is a leader in her school, her district and her community.

The passion she has for setting high expectations for her students translates to a passion for setting high goals for herself and her teaching colleagues.

Natalie serves as a cooperating mentor teacher for John Carroll University. In this capacity she helps train and develop future teachers enrolled in the university's undergraduate education program. She has also served as a District Data Liaison Specialist, working to help her fellow teachers gather and utilize student data to improve instruction methods.

For more than two decades, Natalie has dedicated her time and talent to a number of community and non-profit organizations.

She currently volunteers with the United Way of Cleveland through the Community Investment Committee. Natalie has also served as a volunteer host for homeless families through the Interfaith Hospitality Network; on the Board of Directors and Program Committee of Cleveland Scholarship Programs Inc.; the Supreme Court of Ohio Clients' Security Fund Board of Commissioners; and the Shaker Heights Public Library Board of Trustees.

Lifelong Learner

In Natalie's words, "The day-to-day classroom teaching by an excellent educator is the single most determining factor of student and school success. According to numerous experts and education gurus, it is not class size, class gender, number of classroom computers or special academic programs. It is, quite simply and obviously, the teacher. Excellent, talented teachers are the key to turning around students, classrooms and schools."

Natalie was led to the teaching profession after a successful 22-year career in public relations and marketing because of her son's experience in school and because of her belief that with the right support and nurturing, all children can succeed in school.

She earned a Bachelor of Science in Merchandising from Kent State University and a Master of Science in Journalism from Northwestern University. Once she decided to make the transition to teaching, Natalie earned a Master of Arts in Education from Ursuline College.

Natalie not only sets high goals for her students, she also sets high goals for herself. She is active in her school's Professional Learning Community, and works to constantly collaborate, share and learn with her colleagues. Natalie also mentors student teachers and serves as a teacher leader to help better serve all students, especially challenged learners and disadvantaged children.

Biography

After a successful 22-year career in the field of public relations, Natalie was led to change careers and enter the teaching profession because of experiences her son had in school and her passion to help all students realize their inner genius.

Natalie graduated from Ursuline College in 2005 with a Master of Arts in Education and began teaching third grade at Gearity Professional Development School in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District in 2005.

She is a member of the Education Industry Association, the International Reading Association (online group member) and the International Dyslexia Association (online group member). She is a graduate of Leadership Cleveland.

In 2009, Natalie founded G.E.N.I.U.S. MindWorks, Inc., a non-profit organization committed to helping close achievement gaps by “growing extraordinary new intelligence in underachieving students.”

Natalie has one son.



Natalie Wester and Frances Strickland

Natalie Wester

Through the eyes of her colleagues...

“ (She) encourages excellence in her students by helping them to find that excellence in themselves. These are skills that students can take home with them and that will remain relevant regardless of student interests, skill levels or learning styles.”

“(Natalie) embodies the character of a truly committed teacher who believes in achievement for ALL students without exception or excuses. As she holds the highest expectations for herself as a professional, she also exemplifies a truly caring individual who loves education and lifelong learning.”

“Natalie is a teacher of exceptional talent, but two primary factors particularly set her above the rest. The first is her creative emphasis on developing a sense of personal accountability in children, leading them from looking solely to others for motivation and instead developing in them a sense of ownership for their work and an understanding in consequences... The second factor ties into the first. Natalie takes cues from the business world where she successfully ran her own business to help develop active participants rather than passive learners.”

Ohio



Natalie Wester, Sherry Miller and Deborah Delisle