

Jennifer Walker

2009
Ohio
Teacher
of the Year

“ *It is my goal to help students see school and my classroom as safe, a haven – a place where they can feel confident and successful, loved and nurtured. This is my greatest contribution, and my passion, as a teacher.* ”

– Jennifer Walker



Philosophy of Teaching

I agree with American educator Robert Hutchins' belief: "It must be remembered that the purpose of education is not to fill the minds of students with facts...it is to teach them to think, if that is possible, and always to think for themselves."

I realized that I could have all of the knowledge and credentials, but without a heart for students, I could not be an effective teacher.

My goal as a language arts teacher is to invite all of my students into the literacy circle. I want them to love the language arts and to produce authentic writing and authentic responses to literature.

I want to create a community of learners where we can appreciate others' responses and differences and feel comfortable enough to share our writings.

My mission is to help students grow into adults who enjoy literature, who read it willingly and who respond to it and think about it in ways that enrich their emotional and intellectual lives.

I love teaching with all my heart. I am passionate about students, about literature, poetry, methodology, even unwrinkled, clean, white sheets of notebook paper and new, sharp pencils.

My students have so much to teach me. I am proud that I am open to hearing their voices and learning from them. I am a teacher at heart and that is my proudest accomplishment.

A Leader in School and Community

Jennifer Walker is a leader in her school, her district and her community.

Whenever her school or district has faced a new challenge, she has answered the call.

Two Youngstown high schools were merged into one, East High School (EHS), in 2007. The transition process began in 2005 and included the adoption of a small schools model prescribed by a grant from KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

Jennifer was an integral faculty leader as two very different school communities were blended into one. She helped to draft the mission and vision statements and set curriculum parameters.

When her high school created The Freshman School of Excellence, Jennifer volunteered to trade her coveted assignment teaching senior honors classes and devote herself to educating ninth graders.

As head of the English department, she takes seriously her role as mentor and peer coach. She also heads the literacy cadre for EHS.

In addition to her school and family responsibilities, Jennifer serves as a Sunday school director, responsible for up to 100 elementary-aged children every Sunday morning. She coordinates the volunteers, curriculum, attendance, registration and security for two services each week.

Since 1999, Jennifer has served as chief EHS coordinator for the English festival sponsored by Youngstown State University.

Lifelong Learner

Jennifer Walker is committed to lifelong learning for herself and the lives of the students and adults that she touches.

After receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in her chosen discipline, she has never stopped the development of her professional skills and knowledge.

She obtained Advanced Placement Certification from the College of Wooster in 1999. In 2001, she became a Fellow in the National Writing Project, which helps teachers learn new strategies so that they can assist students in becoming accomplished writers and learners.

After teaching for only seven years, Jennifer earned the highly revered designation of National Board Certified Teacher in Early Adolescence/English Language Arts in 2002.

Jennifer continues to hone her teaching skills through participation in professional organizations, including the National and Ohio Councils for Teachers of English.

She attends professional development sessions not only to enhance her own abilities but to share new skill sets with her fellow teachers.

Jennifer Walker is constantly reflecting and revising her instructional techniques and her team responsibilities to become the best teacher and colleague that she can be.

Biography

Jennifer Walker has been an educator for 14 years. For the past six years, she has taught at East High School (EHS) (formerly Rayen High School) in Youngstown City Schools.

Jennifer has taught English Language Arts, Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, and Foundations of Reading to students in Grades 7 through 12 during her 10 years in the district. She taught in Youngstown's Choffin Junior High School Gifted and Talented program for four of those years.

Previously, Jennifer taught Foundations of Reading and English to ninth and tenth graders at Geneva High School in Geneva, Ohio.

Jennifer earned a Bachelor of Science degree in English Education at Youngstown State University (YSU), with a Reading Endorsement. She has a master's degree in Education from YSU.

In 2002, she achieved National Board Certification in Early Adolescence/English Language.

Jennifer has been chair of the EHS English department since 2007 and lead literacy coach since 2005.

Her many awards and recognitions include English Language Arts coach for the new Ohio Performance Assessment Pilot; 2009 Youngstown State University Outstanding Educator; 2008 Teacher of the Year for Youngstown City Schools and East High School; recipient of a National Education Association Books Across America grant; recipient of WYTV's Steel to Scholars grant; Best Academic Practice School Teacher Award; and chief EHS coordinator for YSU's English Festival since 1999.

Jennifer is married with three sons.



Jennifer Walker, (center), is recognized by the State Board of Education in February 2009. Board President Jennifer Sheets is on left and Superintendent Delisle on right.

Jennifer Walker

Through the eyes of her colleagues...

“I find that her best qualities are relationships, rigor and relevance. Jennifer Walker is the very essence of what a fine educator should be.”

“She is committed to the community she serves, is a tireless mentor to her colleagues and an exemplar of what skilled pedagogical delivery is.”

“I love visiting her classrooms. The walls of her room always ‘talk’ to you about the work occurring. It is fun to watch the relationship that she has with her students.”

“Her enthusiastic approach to teaching is infectious to students as well as the staff members at East High School.”

“She approaches every class with the same motivational drive and positive outlook as if she were teaching her own children. This is one of the highest compliments that can be paid to a teacher, and her students quickly realize this.”

“Ms. Walker’s approach to any task is always the same: she will get it done. No job is too small or too great. She is able to envision the greatest achievements for all her students while attending to the details that will enable them to reach their goals.”

Ohio



Jennifer's students surround her after surprise Teacher of the Year announcement by Superintendent Deb Delisle (fourth from right).