

Please complete your professional biography in 3rd person, as this will be used on your page on the CCSSO website and other promotional materials. By completing this section, you agree that your biography can be used in CCSSO materials. Please follow the content and style guidelines in the application packet. (maximum 250 words)

Leila Kubesch helps students develop their own leadership skills, become global and civic-minded, and break away from limiting beliefs by guiding them to rise above challenges and advocate for community change.

Leila teaches Spanish and English to Speakers of Other Languages at Norwood Middle School. Having committed to teaching in high-need schools, she became resourceful in securing unique opportunities for her students. With the goal of empowering all youth in the same manner as those in affluent communities, she fosters community partnerships, writes grants for innovative learning, and instills a mindset of dreaming big through large-scale service learning projects that stem from youth initiatives. The work of her students has landed in museums around the country and won national recognition.

Her passion for equity and social justice extends beyond the classroom. She served as an advocate for emancipated foster youth in Ohio through raising awareness of the plight of these youth. She presented to large audiences including TedXCincinnati, where she won the Audience Choice Award for her talk. She spoke with politicians and dedicated her effort until House Bill 50 passed, enabling foster youth in Ohio to have a home until age 21.

She places a high value on learning and has studied in eight countries. She earned a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Purdue University and a Master of Arts in Secondary Education from Ball State University. She is a Certified Yoga Instructor and her fellowships include Fund for Teachers, Christa McAuliffe, and Fulbright Hays.



Response Questions

Completed - Nov 1 2019

Response Questions

Respond to the following questions, highlighting your personal story, and why you believe you should be the 2020 National Teacher of the Year. Please indicate evidence of student impact. Please do not include external links. Maximum word counts are indicated in parentheses. Each question refers back to the

aligned criteria on page 1.

1. Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning? How did that learning influence your students? How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in this lesson or unit?

(maximum 750 words)

One of my roles when teaching English Language Learners is to support them in their content classes by making learning comprehensible so that they progress along their peers. For example, I worked with a 7th grade Language Arts teacher on a unit about poetry. He wanted students to write in the Japanese poetic form of haiku. English Language Learners struggled to understand the concepts even after I translated the lesson. They lacked background knowledge in poetry and had difficulty breaking words down into syllables and instead counted silent endings like in the word 'through.' Once they understood those concepts, they asked "What's Japan?"

Having attained the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification early in my career, I have long held a commitment to forming partnerships for powerful results in the classroom. My colleague and I collaborated on how to bring this unit to life for our students. He shared Language Arts standards he wanted to meet and I shared those for English of Other Languages. Once we outlined all standards to cover, I began searching among my connections in our community for an available guest to make the haiku lesson more relevant and exciting. I enlisted a Japanese American haiku master, artist, and calligrapher to spend the day with us. It was a fun treat. The guest came early, set up the classroom, and brought sweets from Japan for students to sample. Students expressed that they had been looking forward to the visit from the time it was announced. One ELL student was so excited about the visit, saying "I never met a person from Japan before!" Other students agreed that they had not met one either.

I reached out to an art teacher at the High School to share about the upcoming visit and that I wished to capture photos of the activities. She sent several of her students to come during different bells and use their talent in photography to capture many photos of our students and the guest. One by one, students wanted their picture taken with our guest and his art. They were beaming with excitement and our guest expressed joy for the rewarding experience.

This activity had a tremendous impact on learning outcomes. Using various writing assessments, all students demonstrated a clear understanding of haiku poetry. ELL students, like their peers, composed at least 10 poems each, opting to practice both in English and their native language. Giving students the

opportunity to practice new writing techniques in their home language in addition to English validated their diversity as an asset and celebrated their unique backgrounds, all while uniting both native English speakers and English learners through the shared learning experience with the guest expert. This made the lesson personally meaningful while helping them develop their academic identity, and as a result, they demonstrated excellent marks on performance assessments in both classes.

Following that activity, many students expressed their desire to learn more about Japan and Japanese culture, showing the value of connecting students with diverse community members. Using this opportunity to develop globally minded youth, I included a lesson about the early US experience of Japanese Americans and helped youth reach out to local Japanese Americans to gain a deeper understanding of their historical and cultural experiences. Designed to encourage students to think critically and develop skills such as oral communication, public speaking, research skills, and interpersonal skills, students were paired with local veterans and conducted interviews, later sharing what they learned.

My beliefs about teaching are shown through this unit because I believe in the importance of creating opportunities to promote global citizenship, ensuring that learning is personally relevant, integrating culturally responsive teaching, and forming partnerships within the school and community. Though we are a Title I school district with a limited budget, our community members have a wealth of expertise, talent and resources, so I enhance teaching and learning by reaching out and using the rich spirit of eager community members to make lessons more relevant and fun.

My colleagues and I use the power of working in partnership and opt to co-teach regularly. Administrators who visit our classes see first-hand the engagement of students and quality of their work. They recognized this collaborative style of teaching for the positive impact it has on all students. My colleagues and I have offered several presentations at conferences to share about the success of co-teaching and using community partnerships for improving interdisciplinary learning and making lessons more engaging with positive outcomes for all students.

2. Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in which contributed to the improvement of overall school culture. What was your role, how did you collaborate with others, and what is the status of this project today? Please include evidence of student impact.

(maximum 500 words)

I uphold that in order for students to master content, we need to first address their immediate needs. The statement “Maslow before Bloom” puts it well.

Youth in middle school are often better versed in what needs they are lacking than the adults around them, so I empower them to address their needs each year by leading my students to work as a class or teams in completing large-scale service learning projects through which they propose solutions to the issues that impact them. The ideas stem from their initiatives and projects end with demonstrable results.

My students aspired to address the hunger they feel prior to lunch. I serve in a Title I school with over 70% of youth on free/reduced lunch. Though we have a breakfast table where free food is available, many students confided that they either arrive too late or feel awkward lining up for one. Their solution was to have breakfast available in the classroom. Their idea initially was not convincing for school leaders, as it would create more work for staff, trash and time constraints of serving it.

To establish a compelling presentation for school leaders, my students conducted research on the impact of breakfast in the classroom on attendance, behavior and academic achievement. They also studied effective ways of serving breakfast in the classroom that would include rapid cleaning, collaboration with peers and effective time use by examining best practices from schools that had successfully implemented similar programs. Students formed teams to address various parts of their research and proposed a budget for needed supplies such as coolers to transport food and trash bins to dispose of litter. They also called merchants to compare prices and seek discounts.

My role was to facilitate the process by connecting them with key stakeholders, including the Director of the Cafeteria and school administrators. I helped them finalize their speeches by listening, filming and offering feedback for improvement. I also wrote a grant to support their initiative and won the 2019 NEA End Hunger Fellowship.

The superintendent was convinced by their presentation, and school administrators allowed my students to pilot the program. Students then sought out teachers to participate in the pilot project for 8th graders. Next year, the pilot program will include 7th graders for a school-wide breakfast program by the end of the year.

The project has been a great success and team members regrouped throughout the pilot process to

share data and make changes as needed. For example, since students are required to take all parts of the breakfast, rather than wasting food they provided a large bin where students could place what they did not want for others to have. This allows others to eat more if they felt hungry after their allotted portion.

From surveying classmates on their breakfast consumption before and during the pilot, they found an increase of over 80% of students eating breakfast, with 100% of youth in the program reporting that they were able to maintain focus until lunchtime.

3. How do you ensure that education transcends the classroom? Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. Please include evidence of student impact.

(maximum 500 words)

A recent student-led project stems from a common sentiment among teens: they often feel like they do not have a voice. My students aspired to be heard, so they proposed a televised youth talk show where they could connect with community members who are experts on topics that interest youth. "Youth Voices in Greater Cincinnati" was launched, along with the parallel program "Voices Without Borders" for youth who prefer to participate in their non-English native language.

For this project they needed to engage in various partnerships and take a leadership role in all aspects of planning and execution. My role was to mentor these students and share resources and connections available within our community. Students connected with Norwood Community Television, a local cable company hosted in our district to edit, produce and air the shows. To secure funding for their program, I participated in the Fuel the Fire Live Pitch Competition, which turned into a tremendous venue for enlisting community members eager to help. FCM, a Chicago-based tech company whose leaders were present at the event, offered to partner with my student to develop a website. In working with FCM developers, my students were guided in all components of their site creation beginning with the layout and design through regular phone and video conferencing. Students were immersed in the entire process including designing logos for each talk show and composing text needed for the website.

I prepare my students to work with diverse community members by teaching them how to host interviews, compose questions, design thank you cards and connect with their guests. Students rehearse with peers prior to each show. The program has become a tremendous success. We have weekly talk shows and guests of the show to date have included a local judge, pediatric surgeon, LGBTQ community

members, Buddhist monks, Jewish rabbi, fire chief, athletes, and international guests including a ballerina from China and a pianist from Korea.

This program has made a huge impact on my students. Their reflections include self-reporting about how much they learned from their guests, that they enjoyed the one-on-one attention and gained an increase in self-confidence. They also expressed that through creating and running their show, they feel like important young community members with valid concerns able to start a larger dialogue, and they are grateful to have a voice and visibility. Students wrote down compliments they received from their guests and always returned after a show beaming with excitement due to how well the show went. Connecting my students with diverse community members exposes them to learn more about the world around them and helps expand their worldview.

I recently won the 2019 Martha Holden Jennings Foundation Grant to update the television studio with newer audio/video equipment and make it possible for 8th graders to learn how to use production equipment and software to create and edit their episodes. For this program, my students and I won the 2019 Ohio Education Association Media for Public Service Award for excellent educational programming.

4. What do you consider to be a major public education issue today? Describe how you demonstrate being a lifelong learner, leader, and innovator about this issue, both in and outside of the classroom walls.

(maximum 500 words)

A major public education issue is how to achieve equity. Our marginalized populations continue to grow—along with their needs—while funding remains limited. I believe, however, that we can use creative strategies to rise and meet the needs of all students.

I place a high priority on understanding my students and their needs to remove barriers to success. Striving to form connections with students and their families, I aim to leverage the power of partnerships for academic achievement. One way I do this is by sending hand-written postcards to each student in our school to welcome them and share that I serve as a resource for them. I also ask students to teach me how to pronounce their names correctly and practice diligently, knowing how validating it is to hear one's name said correctly. Working in a high-needs school, I've learned that many parents are unable to leave work to attend parent/teacher conferences while still being very interested in offering support. Since parents are a valuable resource for the academic success of their children, I offer to visit the homes of my students in the late afternoon or a weekend when they are available, and have been welcomed by their families. Through these visits, I gain valuable insight about the strengths, aspirations, and

challenges facing their child, and together we are able to plan how to best resolve issues or barriers to success faced by these youth.

During these experiences, I learned it was difficult for some students who switched homes weekly to take books with them, limiting their opportunities to practice reading on their own or with adults at home. I invited these youth to propose solutions to promote literacy. One class found a solution by enlisting community members to donate quality books, filling up several boxes. The team placed these books neatly along windowsills on two floors of the school to create a free library, and labeled each book as 'free to keep' or to 'return' when done. Any student can check out a book from the windowsills, so there are no longer excuses on sustained reading days from students who did not bring a book with them.

Another discovery I made through my effort to learn more about my students is the importance of representation in reading material. An African-American 7th grader said that he hated reading because our library had no titles about people like him. I eagerly addressed the challenge through writing a grant with the Dollar General Foundation, using the funds to equip our library with high interest and multicultural books representing the cultures of students at our school.

I serve on the Human and Civil Rights Committee for the Ohio Education Association and attend formal training to deepen my knowledge about equity, including at the Institute on Cultural Competency and Equity Literacy, to stay updated on best practices for improving equity and strengthen my mission of not only inviting youth to join opportunities but also reaching out to ensure they are included.

5. As the 2020 National Teacher of the Year, you serve as a spokesperson and representative for all teachers and students. What is your message? What will you communicate to your profession and to the public?

(maximum 750 words)

Self-care has the ability to make one feel more balanced and in turn positively impacts teaching and learning. As teachers, we often feel too busy to make time for something that may seem as non-essential as taking care of ourselves, but just as flight attendants instruct passengers to put on their oxygen mask before helping others, we are better equipped to help students when we make time to care for ourselves. We can then teach these skills to our students so they too can enjoy benefits of self-care.

Educators are at a high risk of experiencing compassion fatigue, or secondary trauma, being one of the first to listen about stressful conditions students may face, like the loss of a parent or pet, serious illness, and so on. Having an inherent compassion for youth, the emotional effect of holding so much empathy

for those experiencing the trauma first-hand ultimately takes its own toll. Over time, I saw that the needs of our students increased and along with it the need for us to stay strong in order to remain in a position to help elevate them above their struggles. Although we want to resolve their problems, we often cannot change their conditions; however there are many effective strategies we can employ to help both our students and ourselves.

Through research seeking best practices for offering comfort to those who have experienced emotional trauma, I learned about the impact of yoga on self-regulation and resilience. I attended a yoga teacher certification program through a scholarship from the Kripalu School of Yoga, learning techniques for effective emotional care and the science behind them. When we address the social-emotional learning of students, they can release themselves from being trapped in negative feelings that would otherwise impair learning. Children may not be able to control their home lives, but they can learn to control how they react to and deal with stress in a healthy way so they can focus and learn.

I brought yoga to my school and wondered how students would respond. They agreed to try it because they were curious. After starting yoga, a 7th grader ran up to me after school to say, "I feel happy and can't explain it, please invite our class again." An 8th grader told her peers that she used to want to beat somebody up after lunch but after yoga she felt at peace. A newcomer taking English as a Learning Language confided, "Señora Kubesch, my heart feels not compressed. I don't cry now." Do you mean 'depressed'?" I asked. He repeated with resolve, "compressed." Students came to me after school to request yoga on days that it was not offered and I honored their wishes. Collaborating with my assistant principal and with help from students, colleagues, and parents, a large vacant classroom was cleaned, painted, and transformed into a serene in-house yoga studio. Through yoga, participants learn to rise above challenges, develop resilience, establish inner calm, and expand awareness for personal growth, success and healing.

My initial concern about whether using class time to teach self-care would take time from covering academic content dissipated. In a Spanish course taken for high school credit, we covered more chapters than we had during the previous year when no time had been allocated to instruct self-care, and student performance and overall grades exceeded that of their peers in prior years. My English Language Learners also showed faster progress in learning English than in years before.

My personal practice in self-care had a great impact on me feeling calm and clarity even during long commutes to work. I began offering workshops at conferences to teach techniques that yield immediate results that anyone can use, including journaling, breathing techniques, improving self-talk, implementing restorative practices, and promoting kindness and empathy towards oneself and others.

For educators in high need communities, it is especially critical to employ these tools for our youth and ourselves. Many diverse ethnic groups do not seek counseling because it conflicts with cultural norms, even when youth face serious emotional struggles. Remaining mindful of the impact of emotions in the school setting and the role of self-care for students, educators can better help youth in managing emotions and behavior during challenging times. Likewise, it is important as educators to allocate time for our own self-care because we cannot teach what we do not know and cannot offer what we do not have. Self-compassion, self-awareness, and self-empowerment are essential tools in working in high stress environments such as ours.



Letters of Recommendation

Completed - Oct 30 2019

Attach 3 recommendations that support why you should be the 2020 National Teacher of the Year. At least one of these must be a recommendation from a parent, colleague, administrator, or student and each letter should not exceed one page in length. The file should also be in .pdf format.

Please title the file in the following format:

LastName_StateAbbreviation_Recommendation1.pdf LastName_StateAbbreviation_Recommendation2.pdf
LastName_StateAbbreviation_Recommendation3.pdf

Kubesch_OH_Recommendation2

Filename: Kubesch_OH_Recommendation2.pdf **Size:** 38.9 kB

Kubesch_OH_Recommendation3

Filename: Kubesch_OH_Recommendation3.pdf **Size:** 2.1 MB

Kubesch_OH_Recommendation1

Filename: Kubesch_OH_Recommendation1.pdf **Size:** 3.0 MB



Headshot

Completed - Oct 31 2019

Attach a headshot (color, portrait orientation, 300 ppi, .jpg format). This headshot will be used on the CCSSO website and in promotional materials for CCSSO and the NTOY Program. By completing this section, you agree that your biography and headshot can be used in CCSSO materials.

Please title the file in the following format:

LastName_StateAbbreviation_Headshot.jpg

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Filename: Kubesch_OH_headshot.jpg **Size:** 3.0 MB