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Tabatha Rosproy teaches preschool for Winfield USD 465 and Winfield Early Learning Center (WELC) in Winfield, Kansas. Housed in Cumbernauld Village, a local retirement village and nursing home, her classroom is an inter-generational program that provides preschoolers and residents with multiple daily interactions.

This program serves at-risk, special education and typically-developing preschoolers in a full-day setting. Community members visit Rosproy's classroom every day serving as grandparent volunteers, and the preschoolers are in the nursing home every day. One year into this partnership, this program boasts the highest preschool literacy and math scores in the district and has helped build new social capital in the community. Rosproy says, "Both populations benefit from this partnership every single day."

Rosproy holds a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Unified from Southwestern College and is near completion of her Masters of Science in Education (English as a Secondary or Other Language) at Fort Hays State University.

Rosproy is active on her building leadership team, is co-head teacher of WELC and serves as co-president of Winfield National Education Association. She is also active at the state level with Kansas National Education Association.

Rosproy is part of the Cowley County Special Services Cooperative Early Childhood Academy Team, which provides training and support in positive behavior interventions for early childhood teachers in her county. In her decade of teaching, Rosproy has learned the importance of social- emotional education. She prioritizes social-emotional learning in her classroom, as well as educating families and other educators on this important issue.



## Response Questions

Completed - Oct 29 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)

Much of what I see as my purpose in teaching preschool is to guide my students through self-regulation. Students must be able to manage their emotions before academic learning can take place. They must feel safe, loved and connected to their caregivers and the environment. As a teacher, I am tasked with helping students build executive functioning to create healthy relationships with peers and adults. These relationships contribute to building the neural connections children need to learn. Our connections with others literally wire our brains for learning. So, the lesson that defines me as a teacher cannot be narrowed down to one day or period of time – it is social-emotional learning that is a part of the very fabric of our classroom. Every moment of conflict is an opportunity to grow.

I firmly believe in Conscious Discipline, which is a brain-based model for teaching self-regulation. It teaches that discipline isn't something we do to children, but something we develop within them.

We start every school year deeply committed to developing our "School Family." Everyone belongs, is safe and is helpful to one another. Immediately, we are getting to know each other with meaningful play. I create multiple daily opportunities for students to give each other eye contact, smiles and appropriate physical touch, as well as having the opportunity to connect with teaching staff. My paras and I model these interactions and give behavior-specific praise, helping develop a child's power of attention. "I saw you look at your friend's eyes like this and give him a big smile! That made him feel loved. That was helpful!"

Every student has a job every single day. We are all integral parts of the School Family. Jobs include things like holding the flag, taking the recycling out, holding the door, being responsible for carrying the first aid kit and watering the plants. If I have 16 students, I have 16 daily jobs for which my staff and I are committed to following through. Students rotate jobs every week. This helps build ownership and dedication to the structure of our School Family. Every job is important, and every child, no matter their ability, can contribute to our well-being.

We have daily, intentional social-emotional lessons using the Feeling Buddies curriculum, which teaches children about their emotions, how to identify them and how to regulate them. We have a Safe Place in our classroom where children can go to self-regulate, using the skills we practice every day. The Safe Place is not a timeout or a place we make children go. It is a choice to be there, and students choose it again and again as a place that helps them regulate. Pretty soon, they don't need to go to the designated area because they carry a Safe Place in their hearts. This curriculum teaches five steps of self-regulation, which by mid-year, my students are operating independently.

We practice many other things in our classroom to build relationships and emotional well-being. Each student checks-in each morning by choosing how they are feeling on our Feelings Chart to give us a chance to gauge what every child needs that day. They place their pictures in the "Safe Box" so they know they are safe at school. When a child or staff member is absent, we place their picture in the "Wishing Well" and sing our Wish You Well song, sending our love to them. When an absent friend comes back, we give them a "Welcome Back" kiss (a pair of felt lips on a Popsicle stick) and let them know we've missed them! We discuss conflict resolution and practice it like we would any other skill. We are reaching students through their own experiences and daily interactions. Social-emotional learning has empowered my students to have a voice in conflict and to understand that conflict is HOW we learn. This has shaped my students to think critically, to solve problems and to welcome our feelings because our feelings give us information. When we are sad, we need comfort. When we are angry, we need to calm.

These efforts have not only shaped my students, but they have shaped me to the core of who I am. Teaching self-regulation cannot be narrowed down to one lesson or unit because it is so far-reaching, yet it is just as intentional as mathematics or literacy instruction. Every child belongs. Every child is safe. Every child is loved.

**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)

In 2016, I became involved with the Early Childhood Readiness Coalition, a large team of community members who were all stakeholders in early childhood education. Through a grant co-authored by Winfield USD 465 and Winfield National Education Association (WNEA), of which I am the co-president, we attended the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) together and met regularly to discuss early childhood

needs in our community. We identified the need for more full-day preschool experiences.

I volunteered to teach a full-day preschool program serving at-risk students in our community for free in its pilot year. This was Winfield's first full-day preschool classroom not associated with Head Start.

Meanwhile, our superintendent had heard of a kindergarten program in Coffeyville housed in a nursing home and wondered if that might be a possibility for Winfield. Both the school board and Cumbernauld Village, a local retirement village/nursing home, were brought on-board. As a member of the Early Childhood Readiness Coalition, I was in a smaller cohort formed around this partnership. We met with nursing home and district staff to discuss the needs of each population. We sought feedback from other early childhood teachers on the design of the classroom, sharing our input over several meetings with the architect. It was my job to act as a liaison for the preschool teachers and the district in this collaboration. We visited the program in Coffeyville and sent representatives to a program in Enid, Oklahoma, taking notes and building relationships with the stakeholders in their communities.

When it was decided the Winfield program would be a preschool, I applied for the job and was chosen to help build the Cumbernauld Little Vikes program in our community. I spent months collaborating with both the district and Cumbernauld Village employees to plan our first year. We developed a training program for our volunteers, a schedule involving as many "grandparent" volunteers as possible and built a classroom from scratch.

This program serves at-risk, special education and typically-developing preschoolers in a full-day setting. We have attracted community members, media attention and more interested families than we can count. Other teachers come to observe the interactions of residents and students, specifically to learn about creative scheduling and building relationships. One year into this partnership, we boast the highest preschool literacy and math scores in our district and have helped build social capital in our community not present before. Our students have developed empathy for people across generations who are different than they are. They get one-on-one attention that was not possible with just a few staff members in the room.

Collaboration is ongoing between district staff and the stakeholders at Cumbernauld Village. We communicate daily to understand each other's needs. We write grants to enhance our learning experiences. We measure the growth of one another and celebrate together. We navigate loss and celebrate life. Both of our populations benefit from this partnership every single day.

**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)

The program I currently teach is rooted in community engagement. Community members visit our classroom every day, and we are in the nursing home facility every day. I work tirelessly to foster positive relationships between students and the "grandparent" volunteers/residents of Cumbernauld Village.

I get frequent proof of the love and empathy we are building from stories from families. One recently told me about an elderly great-grandpa of one of my students. He is in failing health, and most of the children in the family are too scared to get close. But the student in my class hopped onto his great-grandpa's lap, held his face, rubbed his arms and talked to him like an old friend. This brought tears to the great-grandpa's eyes.

The death of nursing home residents allows us to help our students learn about grief. Through our education about emotions, we learn it's okay to be sad. That feeling may not go away for a while, and we might carry it with us. Sometimes we will feel happy when we think about the person we miss, but it's okay to feel sad. We remember all the things we love about them, celebrating the time we had together. One parent reported her student came home to tell about a resident's death. The mother asked what happened, and the student said: "She was very old, and her body was tired and couldn't fight anymore. We will miss her and always remember her." The mother was impressed at the eloquence of her four-year-old daughter and the way she was coping with loss.

We connect to the world around us in broader ways. I contacted a college alumna at the American Museum of Natural History in New York to organize a personal, virtual tour of the museum for my students, enabling them to see and hear about prehistoric animals in a new way. We have had pen pals in China, learning about their culture and education system. We learned about the needs of stray animals in our community and visited the Humane Society, bringing donations and homemade treats. We picked up trash on walks around the neighborhood. We invited guest speakers to teach us about gardening and understanding physical disabilities, giving a safe place for our students to ask questions and build empathy for others. We have "Historic Show and Tell," inviting senior citizens to share items from their past, as well as special talents, collections and hobbies. I use social media as a platform to talk to families and the community at large about what we are learning in our classroom. I look for ways to speak positively about USD 465 and to engage the community in our learning.

I alone cannot offer my students everything they need to be kind, empathetic, productive members of

society. I get to bridge those relationships with other people. I help plant seeds of learning and connections to people who can help maintain the garden for years to come.

**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)

As both populations and government regulations on public schools have increased, I sense a distance between public schools and the families we serve. Sensationalist news media outlets often portray public schools as ineffective and financially burdensome on the public. I have taken a vested interest in increasing family engagement and activating stakeholders to combat that distance and challenge those misconceptions.

One way I demonstrate my dedication to increasing family engagement and positive community perception is to get involved in organizations that further the spirit of public education. I am a member of the steering committee of Save our Schools/Cowley County, a grassroots, non-partisan group of Cowley County citizens working to promote a positive climate for public education and educators, educate the public about the need for the state budget to adequately support our schools and influence policymakers to increase support for public schools.

I am the co-president of Winfield National Education Association and am active at the state level with Kansas National Education Association. I have attended multiple leadership trainings, a social/racial justice summit and countless events to further the mission of public schools in Kansas. I share the information I receive with families and other stakeholders to increase their awareness of the issues facing students and teachers. I am on the negotiations team, maintaining a positive relationship with administration and representing the rights of our teachers in Winfield. I also work with Circles Cowley County as Children's Programming Director, helping in our initiative to end poverty in Cowley County. Here, I learn not only about issues facing students during the school day, but of the various barriers in their homes.

More personally, I strive to deepen family involvement within my own classroom and community. I wrote and received a grant to hold a Family Book Club, targeting social-emotional development over the book *Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline* by Dr. Becky Bailey. Over the 10-week book study, we met together every other week and offered free childcare to families. I partnered with a middle school service club to provide the childcare and created easy lessons for them to engage the kids while I engaged the

parents/caregivers in growing their parenting skills. I have an open-door policy in my classroom, and families are invited to attend all of our special events and to volunteer in/visit the classroom as much as they would like. I share pictures and information on our classroom social media pages to keep families connected to their child's learning. I attend community events my students are involved in and interact with their families, building our relationships and dedication to each other and their child.

Whatever I do, I want people to know that teachers care and that public schools serve all students, no matter their background or circumstance. All families are deserving of our help and worthy of the time and effort we get to spend engaging them in school community.

**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)

If chosen as the 2020 National Teacher of the Year, I would communicate that social-emotional learning should be at the forefront of our education system; engaging families and the community can further a child's emotional growth; and every teacher has the ability to advocate for children, for other teachers and for public schools.

Public schools are necessary to the foundation of our society; they not only serve the public, but in a way, they create it. The overwhelming majority of children attends public school. This is a responsibility I do not take lightly.

A large portion of our student and family population have experienced, or are currently experiencing, trauma in the home, which inhibits the early development of executive functioning and other critical life skills. We cannot create an emotionally-literate public without fully addressing these emotional needs. We must teach self-regulation skills that transcend the four walls of the classroom. Social-emotional learning must be a cornerstone of our education system because only when students feel safe can they really learn.

What we now know as best practices for teaching self-regulation are sometimes counterintuitive to traditional models of discipline, but I hope to challenge educators and the community to think about emotional education in the same way we think about academics. We do not punish children when they are struggling to understand a math problem or how to read a word. So why then would we punish a child for not successfully regulating their emotions, especially when not intentionally taught to do so? If we can

engage students in thinking critically about conflict and emotions, we can empower them to solve the problems they will face in life, ultimately contributing to our communities in more productive and healthy ways.

Research supports the benefits of early intervention, but social-emotional education can't stop in preschool. It has to be an integral part of every day for every child. This means quality training for all educational staff. This means carrying the responsibility of shifting the public perception of what discipline looks like. This means teaching stakeholders that discipline isn't something you do to children, but it is something you develop within them. This means being willing to change our minds about how we've always done things. This means engaging families in the process, building trust and sharing resources.

When considering the social-emotional education of a child, we must also ask ourselves: "Are we extending student relationships to people outside of the classroom who can support them in the community as they grow?" Families are our number one resource, and we are theirs. Building a rapport and a trusting relationship with families is vital to a child's success in life. In addition to families, we should also look to the community as a valuable resource for children. In order for our students to be successful, we need healthy relationships with the community that will have a part in nurturing their growth. These relationships create mutual respect, support for the causes of public schools, career opportunities for our students and the connections students need to become a functioning piece of their communities.

Every child has the right to quality programming and quality public schools. Our responsibility as educators is to support that mission and to share with the community all the wonderful things going on within our schools. The way we speak to our children becomes their inner-voice, and the way we speak about our jobs becomes public perception. I am the first person to fight for teacher and student rights, but also the first person to express my deep respect and value for what public schools offer to our community. We can fight for change and still be ambassadors for our field. To love something is to fight for it to be the best it can be.

As we take on these challenges in education, all educators should remember that our position comes with a voice, and we can use that voice to reach our students, families and our communities. Our future is brighter together!