

I Love My Librarian!

2010 Award

Nomination for Patricia J. Updike

Webb Street School
Gastonia, North Carolina

Nominator:

Jordan Trogdon
Gastonia, North Carolina

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

Webb Street School has the privilege of working with Ms. Patti Updike. Webb Street is a public separate school for students grades K-12 with significant cognitive and/or physical disabilities. Patti serves the entire school as our media specialist. Her dedication to teaching as well as to fellow colleagues of Webb Street School is evident to everyone. Patti exemplifies creative and enthusiastic teaching while promoting her love for literature. Thanks to Patti's efforts our Media Center serves as a hub of learning in our school.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Our school serves a population of students, ages 5 years to 22 years, with disabilities ranging from moderate to severe/profound cognitive impairments. There are very few materials available for teaching these students academics, especially reading and literacy. Patti spends endless hours after school and at home adapting books into written and symbol/picture manipulative materials. She creates interactive books utilizing computer technology and develops methods for the students to write about what they have read. She adapts books for our visually impaired individuals, providing textures and manipulatives to explain the content of the book. She also adapts books to provide access to physically impaired individuals through the use of the Smartboard and the computer. Patti develops lesson plans which provides access to books, reading, comprehension, and expression for each individual in our school of 170 students. Last year, Patti partnered with three other staff members at the school and developed a planning chart for teachers to take a book and teach the required standard course of study using the vocabulary and concepts from the book. Patti saw the value of teaching these skills through the use of books and adapted materials to address all areas of standard course of study as well as self help, community based experiences, and character education. Because of her dedication and development of the planning chart

our teachers have seen the importance of literacy and teaching academics through books which are adapted for our special needs students.

3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Patti is conscientious about carrying out her responsibilities of being our librarian with excellence. On a daily basis, she looks for better and brighter ways of introducing technology and adapting materials to meet the challenges of our special needs population. She has an ability to look beyond the disability and see the great potential in each student by creating materials that are on a level of understanding and incorporating technology to make learning fun. She makes good use of the Smartboard and software programs that enhance the instruction of language and literacy. Not only has she adapted books and introduced more technology to our students, she has also mentored our staff in these areas by teaching many workshops. Her commitment goes above and beyond her role as a librarian. She has written numerous grants to help with much needed supplies for our school. Patti teaches 18 classes a week from Kindergarten through 12th grade taking special care to meet each class on their individualized level. In addition to all these qualities, she is a team player and assists in whatever capacity needed with a positive attitude. She truly makes Webb Street School a better place.

4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

Many people may think that students with significant disabilities, who may not be able to read, write, or even talk, do not need exposure to classic literature. Patti has proved that students with even the most significant disabilities can access and experience literature in a significant way. One example of how Patti has transformed our school is through her determination to expose our high school students to the classic novels our county requires all regular education students to learn. Patti has successfully taken 14 classic novels and adapted them into literary units that our students can understand and learn. Even though our high school students may function on a 1st or 2nd grade level, Patti provides age appropriate and meaningful literature experiences to them. With each classic novel Patti teaches our students, she spends hours researching ways to incorporate the theme of the story into our school's functional curriculum. Patti finds a way to integrate the novel into each functional subject area that is taught to our students. In the past several years, Patti has adapted classics such as *The Odyssey*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Animal Farm*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *Treasure Island*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. Last year, our students studied the classic *Beowulf*. Many teachers wondered how Patti could ever teach a complex novel such as *Beowulf* to over 70 high school students with severe cognitive delays. With many hours of research, Patti adapted each chapter of the book and made visual supports to supplement the reading. She also collaborated with the high school teachers and integrated the novel in all of the different subject areas. For example, in math class our students designed a Viking ship and looked at what the lengths and measurements of a real Viking ship would have been. In geography and science, our students studied about life in Scandinavia and took a virtual tour of the country on Google Earth. In our life skills class the students made Old English food like Scandinavian donuts. Our students were totally fascinated by *Beowulf* and absolutely loved reading and learning the story. When asked what their favorite book was, one student responded, "Beowulf is my favorite book because it was really cool and I liked how Beowulf killed Grendel and Grendel's mother and became the hero." Many would find it hard to imagine that students with severe cognitive delays could interpret the meaning of this multifaceted novel. Patti has the unique gift of taking something that seems impossible to outsiders and making it a reality

for our students. It is such a wonderful feeling knowing our students are participating in the literature their non-disabled peers are at other schools around the county. Patti has a direct impact on how the teachers, administration, and the community view the capabilities of our students. The high expectations Patti upholds for our students is outstanding. While many students with significant disabilities will never have the chance of experiencing classic literature in a manner they can interpret and understand, ours receive that opportunity because of the creativity, dedication, and effort Ms. Patti Updike. She has introduced our students to a brand new world of literature that has expanded their horizons while impacting their learning for a lifetime.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?

Patti has demonstrated leadership in our school and community through her participation with various committees. She served as the School Improvement Team Chairman from 2005-2008 where she helped to revise and develop a School Improvement Plan. For three years, Patti was on the County Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Council. She also served as our schools Systems Operations Manager who kept all of our technology working. She is a longtime member of the North Carolina Association of Educators and served as the representative for Webb Street School. She is currently the chair of the fundraising and grant writing committee. Patti has attended the North Carolina Teacher Academy summer institutes for the past two years sharing the information she learned to provide training to teachers and support staff. Patti has also used her technology skills to collaborate with our speech language pathologist in creating a workshop where teachers could learn how to adapt books into a computer program, making the books accessible to students using a switch device. Patti and our speech language pathologist presented an ongoing workshop to teachers in our school that provided continuing education reading credits to teachers who attended. Patti demonstrates leadership not only to the teachers at our school, but also within our community. As mentioned earlier, she is the chairman of the fundraising and grants committee, of which she developed on her own. Patti saw the need for more technology and instructional materials for our students and decided to involve the surrounding community. With the fundraising and grant committee, Patti hopes to reach out to community businesses and individuals to raise support and funding for various projects and resources to enhance the instruction of our students. When school lessons or project involve multiple classrooms, Patti is always willing to provide organizational assistance and suggest methods of using the resources of the Media Center to make lessons more appealing and relevant to students.