

TEACHER *of the* MONTH

2021-2022
Winners



Nikki Stigall

Sommer Elementary School

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

My second grade teacher inspired me to be a teacher! She was absolutely amazing and cared so much about every student. I was fortunate enough to work with her during my last year of high school and her last year of teaching.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

My second grade teacher, Mrs. Katie Lewandowski, at Bainbridge Elementary.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

It was tough! I was a special education teacher my first year. I took over for a teacher that had been there for 35 years and it was the first year of the new individualized education plan program.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

Definitely the relationships that I build with my students. I enjoy the hugs when they come back to see

me in fifth grade. I enjoy seeing them outside of school. My first group of fourth graders are seniors this year so those relationships are truly special!

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

It has gotten difficult, mostly due to state regulations of testing.

6. Tell a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

A favorite object in my room would have to be a dolphin figurine that a student brought me back from Florida. He was a student that had many challenges but I enjoyed my time spent with him. He bought me the dolphin with his own money while on vacation. It reminds me to continue putting relationships before the curriculum.

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

My students do lots of fun things! My favorite thing to teach is Lego Economics.

8. Tell about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity?

My teaching partner/s collaborate daily! Teamwork is important

at the elementary level. My teaching partner and I work together on a daily basis with planning and communicating.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

Before I purchased nicer dry erase erasers, we were using old (but clean!) socks as erasers. One of my math groups was putting their stuff away and I told them put their sock in their textbook to mark their place for tomorrow. One of my students put the sock in their book and then proceeded to say, 'Dobby is a free elf. Master has presented Dobby with clothes.' I am a huge Harry Potter fan so I laughed!

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

To make it your passion. You cannot be a teacher in today's world without having passion. Even on the rough days, remember why you're there and who you are there for!



Brooke Mefford

Hoover Elementary Aide



1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

My cousin, Heather Sutton, because once you get into and see the kiddos you just can't leave them.

2. Who was your favorite teachers when you were in school?

Miss Swaim at Hoover Elementary School.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

I didn't know what I was doing at first.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

The kiddos and the love I have for them!

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

I didn't think I would like it, but now I love

doing it!

6. Tell a story about a favorite object in your classroom?

My colored pens. I'm more organized that way!

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

Cain Farm, Camp Tecumseh.

8. Tell about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity.

I have never collaborated with

another teacher since I'm a teacher's aide.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

On the first day of school in 2021, we had a student licking the board.

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

Don't give up on your dreams, chase after them! Try out stuff even if you don't like doing it. You may end up loving it!



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Megan Kaur

New Market Elementary/Music

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

My mom actually inspired me to become a teacher. I loved going to her classroom when I was little to play on her chalkboards or pretend to teach my brother in her room. She inspired me because I was also one of her students that saw first hand how she made history fun and exciting for everyone.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

My favorite teacher would be a toss up between Mrs. (Shelle) Norman for English/ film lit and Mr. (Reasley) Thompson for economics.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

My first teaching job was at Sugar Creek Elementary, where the support of the families and students was impeccable. Mr. Mellish was my first principal that hired me and I will never forget the phone call I got just hours after my interview saying that I got the position.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

My favorite part of teaching music is that I get to come to work to teach my passion that helps define who I am as a person every single day to my students. I genuinely get up every morning excited to teach my students because it's fun for me to see them as excited as I am.

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

The job has obviously changed since I first started teaching because of some of the restrictions COVID-19 has placed on the schools, which is still impacting the schools in our county. I think as teachers, we have done an awesome job trying to find a new "normal" in education and still making it meaningful for our students.

6. Tell a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

A special object that I have taken in every single classroom I have taught in would have to be the picture my Grandma Huckstep painted me the year I graduated from college. It's a picture of a music teacher, teaching the class how to put stems on quarter notes for the song "Rain Rain Go Away." Every time I see it, I'm reminded of the love and support I have from my entire family and all the educators that inspired me along the way.

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

My students are performing in two programs this year: a Christmas program for grades Kindergarten through third, as well as a spring performance for the fourth and fifth graders, which will also dual as a fifth grade graduation ceremony.

8. Tell about a time you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity?

My very first years of teaching, my art collaborative teacher and I worked together to make a Fine Arts Night happen at the school, which had never been done before. The level of teamwork that was, as well as all the planning that went into making those nights happen was outstanding.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

When I taught at Hose Elementary, I was getting ready to send my class back to their teacher before Valentine's Day, where I wished them all a great weekend and to have a wonderful Valentine's Day, with lots of chocolate. One student raised his hand with a



straight face and said "I'm allergic to chocolate and love ... it's hard being 6." It was the most hilarious, yet random moment to date.

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

My best advice is to not be afraid to try new things and to also know that each day will not be perfect. Find your "Why?" for teaching and hang on to that, especially when the times are a little harder than others. But, also know that each day is an adventure and to enjoy every moment making memories with your students and your colleagues.

Amy Johnson

New Market Elementary School



1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

I was one of the babysitters in New Market. Sometimes I would babysit alone and sometimes I worked with my best friend. I realized at a young age that I loved children and being a part of their lives was rewarding. I still keep in contact with most of the children I babysat.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

There are so many wonderful teachers, but the two that really stand out for me are Mrs. Baxter from third grade and my PE teacher, Mr. Dave Williamson. They both made me feel like I could accomplish anything. They had confidence in me, and it helped me to believe in myself. Also, my mom and siblings were teachers as well. They taught me life lessons that carry with me to this day.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

I remember being hired five days before school started which was terrifying and exciting. I remember my students from my first

teaching job and how much I felt very protective of them. I still keep in contact with a lot of them. I still have a sense of protectiveness and pride in how well they are doing.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

My favorite part of teaching is seeing a child gain confidence and become a strong student. I also love the connections you make with the students and the families over the years. I get to work with many of my students from the time they are in kindergarten until they are in the fifth grade. Seeing the change and the confidence they build over time is very rewarding.

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

Teaching has changed because children have more issues that affect them. I feel students have more worry now than they did when I first started. Too many students have to grow up faster and take on more responsibilities that are not meant for children to handle. We see more emotional pain.

6. Tell a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

My favorite object in my classroom is my family picture of my daughter's wedding. My family is what keeps me grounded and keeps me moving forward no matter what happens.

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

Thanks to our principal, my students got to be the first group in our school to start using the Orton Gillingham approach to phonics and reading. It is a multisensory approach to learning. The change over time that we are seeing has been fulfilling. We are now implementing it in the whole school to enhance our reading program.

8. Tell about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity?

In my job we have to collaborate every day with almost everyone in the building. This job is a team effort with many different people involved. We work as a team to provide the best education for the students. We discuss lesson plans, teaching strategies, behavior strategies, and ways to reach students who are struggling academically as well as emotionally. The team at New Market makes collaboration easy and enjoyable.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

I noticed a boy and girl were arguing. I told them that I had seen

children who fought all the time end up married. He told me that he may not like her, but at least he would be married.

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

When a child is causing problems or acting out, look past it. Try to find the real cause of the problem. There are many students who only feel safe at school. Their behavior may be a reflection of the chaos they are feeling. Children don't always know how to express themselves. A person's childhood does not always determine the path they will take in life. A little love can go a long way.





Cindy Pierce

Crawfordsville Middle School

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

I have always loved children and wanted to be a teacher since I was in high school.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

Mrs. Box (kindergarten) and Mrs. Nieman (English) in Kansas

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

I was so busy! Planning and teaching fifth and sixth graders in a combination class - no breaks!

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

Watching that "light bulb come on" when kids learn.

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

I've become more patient!

6. Tell me a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

Hometown Happenings

- my displays of family, friends, and places back home to share some "Kansas" with my Indiana friends.

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

Youth Service Bureau projects, Purdue Extension Office activities, and service projects in the community

8. Tell me about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity.

I have been privileged to co-teach with amazing teachers the past few years, collaborating on math and language arts lessons.

9. What is one of the most rewarding stories you can share about a student?

This job has given me the opportunity to help struggling students succeed. Students from the past 18 years have come back and thanked me for my help; that is reward enough!

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

Always look for the positive from students, coworkers, and administration. It's there!



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Brian King

Walnut Elementary School

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

I enjoy working with children. They have a strong sense of curiosity that is contagious. Children are well-equipped to move forward from failure and grow. It's no exaggeration to say that I am inspired every day that I am around them, whether that be students at school or children in my own family.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

For me the most influential teacher I had in school was Lisa Cosby. Mrs. Cosby had just the right balance of care and discipline required to push students beyond their comfort zone, in a way that made you believe success was in your own hands. That's such a vital part of life.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

I hit the jackpot with Walnut Elementary. The staff was hard-working and supportive, my first principal was a strong leader, and the parents of my first class went out of their way to make the educational process an enjoyable one.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

The kids: their energy, their curiosity, and how excited they still get to learn. In the 23 years I have taught, many things have changed. But a child's innate desire to learn, has not.

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

The biggest change in education has been the access to technology. Students in the modern classroom have access to the Internet, they have a wide variety of resources to use for research and skill practice, plus immediate feedback on skills for which they might need more exposure. Such tools allow for more efficient collaboration and project-based learning.

6. Tell a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

I love notes from kids, especially when they include why they enjoy being in my class or when they cite something specific that occurred in the school year. I keep most of them and reread them from time to time. Children are very good at expressing themselves, and they are so honest with their feelings ... making some of their comments quite entertaining.

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

Several years ago, back when I was teaching sixth grade, I had a class create an app with writing prompts and illustrations. The app

was accepted by and published on the Apple App Store. It was a difficult process but educational. The kids were excited once it was available for download.

8. Tell about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity?

One year a colleague and I did a Super Bowl themed competition. We created a bulletin board of a football field in the hallway (about 10 feet long), had each student draw a football player, and allowed them to move their player down the field each time they earned an A or B. I remember the activity got very competitive and a few students who were not typically motivated about their work, go all in on making the grade each day.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

I did have a sixth grade student accidentally call me "grandma" in front of the class once. Not sure why she didn't at least say "grandpa," but it was a good laugh in any case. Probably one of the most comical things that happens to me with children occurs when I am around the preschoolers and kindergarteners. Most of them have not grasped the concept of Mr. and Mrs. yet, so they think that the title "Mrs." is actually the first name for all teachers. I get a lot of "Hi, Mrs. King" when I pass



them in the hallway or on bus duty. I don't have the heart to correct them, because it's absolutely adorable each and every time.

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

Be sure to find time to have the small conversations with children. This is paramount. Listening to their stories about what they did the night before, what they are involved in, and what they are going through, no matter how trivial, can build rapport in a short time. It's easy to get too busy and forget to do this, so I make it a point to have this be the first thing I do every morning. As a teacher, motivating and helping children can be disciplined individuals are much easier when they truly believe you care.

We would like to show our sincerest appreciation for each and every teacher who makes such a huge difference in all the childrens' lives! **Thank you so very much** for going above and beyond to make a life changing difference! We are sending our love, big hugs, blessings and prayers to each and everyone of you and your family.

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Adam Welcher

North Montgomery Middle School

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

Like for many, the thing that inspired me to become a teacher was teachers I had growing up. I would argue most people that get into education get into it to make a difference in people's lives. Once I learned the power in that regard that teachers have, pursuing it as a career became my goal.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

There are so many teachers who had a big impact on me. The first two that came to mind were Marci Huckstep, who I had as a history teacher in high school, and Joan Brenda, who was my fourth grade teacher. With Joan, everyone felt welcome. I remember the classroom feeling like a second home where everyone felt comfortable enough to be themselves and soak in all she was trying to teach us. With Marci, I remember being so locked in and engaged with everything she was saying. She had an unreal ability to make topics interesting and memorable. While the last two years of high school can be stressful for many, that was one class every day I could not wait to go to.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

I have been fortunate enough to be at North Montgomery my entire career. I remember early in my career being far too reactive about spur of the moment comments people would make. Everything was personal, and looking back it was because I was still in the "impress everyone" phase. As you stay in the career longer, you learn to not get caught up on the little things.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

Relationships created with students is easily the best part of teaching for me.

It is such a rewarding experience to be a part of a kid's growth and development toward adulthood. Being at the middle school, it has been really cool to meet kids when they come in at 10 years old and maintain a relationship with them as they go through high school and beyond.

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

We rely much more on technology now than we did when I first started teaching. In a lot of ways I love it and in many others I miss the "old school" paper and pencil way of doing things.

6. Tell me a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

I don't do this as much anymore with changes due to COVID protocols, but for the greater part of my teaching career a friend had gotten me a plastic Captain America shield that I had kids use as a bathroom pass. The kids loved carrying it to and from their trip, and we would clean it each time a kid returned. It led to so many good conversations between and after classes about movies/comics.

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

For years, eighth grade students at NMMS attended a follow the North Star Field Trip at Conner Prairie where they would be thrust into a role as a runaway slave to see some of the trials people would go through during this time period of history. It was such a cool experience for not only the kids, but the adults as well. It really opened their eyes in a hands on fashion to a very important time period in American History, and the discussions we had coming back to class in the following days were always excellent.

8. Tell me about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity?

My current teaching partner in sixth

grade English, Carrie Kerns, is a rock star when it comes to this. We meet weekly and discuss upcoming plans and strategy lessons for our kids and she has really taught me a lot about how to make content fun and engaging for sixth graders. Spending most of my career in eighth grade, the shift back to sixth grade came with some challenges, and she has made that transition so much smoother.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

So many come to mind, but a recent one deals with a student who asked a question when we were reading about the yellow fever outbreak in Cuba of the early 1900's. Early on in the story, the author is describing one of the American doctors who traveled to Cuba to search for the cause of the disease. She documented how he quickly found out he was prone to seasickness and frequently "fed the fishes" by getting sick. When we read that part of the story, and were making predictions about how effective each of the doctors we were talking about would be at their roles moving forward, a student asked, "Welcher, how can we think this guy is going to be good at this job if he's not even focused on learning more about the disease on his trip to Cuba? I mean, he's spending all of his time feeding the fishes with fish food he brought rather than studying. He's gonna be no good." Before laughing to myself, I remember looking around the other kids in the room to see if they understood the reference, and they were all looking around at each other not wanting to be the first ones to laugh. We ultimately explained to him what the analogy meant, but got a very good laugh out of it before.



10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

Any aspiring educator should know to never fall in the trap of thinking you've got this job "figured out." While you become better at your processes and routines, as cliché as it sounds, every kid is different and with that, no matter how many kids you work with, new challenges will come your way. Being in year 10, that number of students for me is in the thousands, and there are still things that happen occasionally that force me to think about how to best handle the situation. Applying adult logic to teenagers or whatever age group of kids you are working with isn't always the best way to understand the "why" of their thought process in a situation. No matter how many years we've taught, we need to challenge ourselves to remember what it was like to be and think like the age of kid we are leading. It helps us to better understand them, and forge relationships that are built on solid foundations that will last.

Meredith Boaz

Nicholson Elementary

March
2022

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

My mom is a teacher, so I grew up knowing the importance and impact of teaching. She inspired me to become a teacher myself.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

My favorite teacher was Mrs. Isobel Arvin. She had high expectations of me, and always taught in a way that was engaging and interesting.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

My first teaching job was in a public school Pre-K classroom. I remember the hard work, long hours of prep that led to fun, creativity, and LOTS of smiles every day. It was totally worth it!

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

My favorite part of teaching is being able to build relationships with my students. I want them to know that I care about them and that they can trust me. That is

when learning can take place.

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

My first year of teaching was over 20 years ago! So much has changed. State standards

now heavily guide instruction, and students seem to have increasing emotional needs. The much-needed emphasis placed on student mental and emotional health has increased.

6. Tell me a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

During my first year of teaching, I went to a conference about acknowledging and addressing individual student needs. The keynote speaker said something powerful that I wrote down on a yellow sticky note. The quote was "The power of life and death is in a teacher's tongue." I still have that sticky note. It has been in the top draw of my desk in my classroom or office for over 20 years. I see it every day. It is still just as powerful and true.

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

This year, we adopted a class calf through the Discover Dairy program. We got weekly pictures, updates, and activities. We met our

host farmer and took a virtual tour of the dairy farm where our cow, Dolly, is being raised. My students have also participated in building a menu for a restaurant, water cycle experiments, slime day, family game days, studying snowflakes, and many other fun activities and experiments.

8. Tell me about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity?

We have a "buddy classroom." Another second grade teacher and I collaborate on class rewards, fun days, and breaks for students. It has worked well to motivate students and foster collaboration. I also collaborated with a third grade teacher to send good luck cards and notes to each other's students for encouragement on state testing.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

I had a teacher's aide several years ago who was pregnant. We did a class poll about what we all thought her baby's name should be. One of my students insisted that she name her baby "Snake," and

when the baby was born he was so disappointed, he refused to refer to the baby as anything other than "Snake."

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

My best piece of advice for an aspiring educator is to make an effort to build a relationship with every student. Relationships are key to building trust. Our kiddos need to know that we care about them and that we are interested in them as people. Relationships are the key to open the door to authentic learning.



Leslie Peacock

Nicholson Elementary

April
2022

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

I did not start my career in education but in sales & marketing. I realized after a decade that I wanted to make more of an impact in our community and in people's lives. I went back to school when my own children were very young and got into education!

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

My third grade teacher at Hoover Elementary — Barb Foster! She helped me navigate a tough year in my childhood and will always hold a special place in my heart.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

My first teaching job came as a Developmental Therapist with First Steps. I worked with children 0-3 years old and introduced

them to the fascinating world of learning.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

Hands down — the relationships that I form with students. I make it a priority to get to know students & their families. I get so much joy seeing students years later and getting to catch up with them.

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

I think education, in general, has changed drastically over the years. We had to get very creative and dig into our toolkits to adapt to the changes and challenges brought on by COVID-19.

6. Tell me a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

I have a variety of items in my office that offer comfort and relaxation for students. My favorite is a stuffed-dog named Sparkles. I have a student that “dog sits” for Sparkles during the day, which allows me to check-in with the student each morning and check-out at the end of the day. Sparkles has become quite the companion and class mascot!

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

Since I get to work with all Nicholson students, my favorite is when we all get together for our Knighting Ceremony. We get to recognize students (in front of their families and peers) whom have earned all six Pillars of Character by granting them Knighthood. It is a special time for all students to experience the Knighting.

8. Tell me about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity?

Every day we are working together as a team to make the best learning environment for all of our students.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

One of the best laughs I get is around Halloween time when the students get to vote what Ms. Coyle (Principal) and I dress up

as! We've been Taco Belle (a taco and Belle from Beauty and the Beast), Ghostbusters, Little Bo Peep and her sheep and a chicken and a waffle. The ideas the students come up with are always hilarious.

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring educator?

At the end of the day, it's always about the kids. YOU make a difference. YOU matter to these kids. YOU are appreciated.



Shelle Norman

Southmont High School

May
2022

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?

I have always loved reading and writing, and I wanted to share that passion with my students. My dad was also a teacher, and I have always looked up to him and admire him immensely.

2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school?

My favorite teacher of all time is Joyce Grumble, my Foods teacher at North Montgomery High School. She is the person who taught me my love of cooking and baking.

3. What do you remember about your first teaching job?

My first teaching job was at Southmont teaching senior English and Film Literature. I had a great group of students that year, and we had lots of fun. I have been at Southmont ever since, although now I am the junior high/high school librarian.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

My favorite part of teaching is seeing a student's face light up when they grasp a new concept. It is an awesome thing to witness!

5. How has the job of a teacher changed since your first year in the classroom?

So much has changed since I first started teaching 21 years ago. For me personally, it has changed simply because I am now the junior high/high school librarian and only teach one sixth grade class a day. Teaching sixth grade is a lot different than teaching seniors, for sure!

6. Tell me a story about a favorite object in your classroom.

A favorite object in my classroom is a glass paperweight that two students from my very first class at Southmont gave to me for Christmas. A funny story: those two students are now married with children!

7. What kind of special projects or activities have your students participated in?

When I taught high school English, I always had my students

participate in the Montgomery County Character Counts essay contest. Now that I am teaching library media, we do all kinds of fun projects and learn about safety on the internet.

8. Tell me about a time when you collaborated with another teacher for a lesson or activity.

I have a wonderful assistant, Julia Ward, who works with me in the library, and we collaborate on reading contests for both junior high and high school students every year.

9. What is one of the funniest stories you can share about a student?

I have too many stories to count about current and former students, but I will say that a few of my former students are now working as teachers here at Southmont, and that makes me feel very old!

10. What's your best piece of advice for an aspiring teacher?

My best piece of advice for an aspiring teacher is to have fun

with the profession but also be professional. You are going to be a role model for many people over the years, so be someone that they can look up to and admire.



Color Me!





‘Education is not the filling of a pot but the lighting of a fire.’
–W.B. Yeats

Thank you educators for all that you do!

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119 N Green St, Crawfordsville, IN | (765) 362-1200