



2021
Educator Comments

Sveri Stomsta May

“Being a teacher that teaches Social Studies there is always the window to discuss the historical aspects, present and future ways of how practices, events and legislation had and has impacted people of our country and around the world. Now add being a Peacejam advisor for 17 years and being a class advisor for 32 years to this and having students doing community service at Loy Norrix, our community, our state, our nation and worldwide helps students to know at a young age they can have an impact on the help they have given others and make an impact on themselves as well.”

Dylan Patterson

“I try to treat high school students with the same respect that I would any adult. I speak to them as I would an adult. I listen to their thoughts and input with the same value I would an adult. When I see a student striving to expand their knowledge and skills and try something new, I try to give them opportunities to do so. It’s incredibly rewarding to see them thrive in new ventures and I have had the pleasure of having a front row seat to one of the most impressive young adults I have ever met.”

Eric M. Soulier

“With AP Statistics we are able to dive into applicable math, math that is all around us. By developing an understanding of how data and statistics are used in different areas of our world, and how it can be useful in any profession, allows students to make a personal connection with the content. We hope students will develop an appreciation for math and gain a better understanding and perspective of the world we live in.”

Amber French

I work hard to always understand my student's needs and to help them with these while also covering the content. The first way is to equip them with the tools to be successful in a college science setting. I work hard to make sure that students not only gain the knowledge they need to succeed in college but also to make sure that they have the skills that they need to be successful too. We work on note-taking, responsibility, self-reflections, and problem-solving techniques in class frequently. The way that our chemistry and physics programs run I ask students to think beyond the box frequently. We work on hands-on activities that help them discover ideas and concepts on their own and then work towards understanding. This process of approaching an unknown idea and asking questions/experimentation to discover these ideas helps students to be able to approach unknowns after high school as well. Continued...

Amber French

While I do teach chemistry and physics, I know that what my students need is not always science and science-related skills. I try to embed many other aspects of life into my classroom. On Fridays my students spend the first 5-10 minutes of class reflecting on their week (home and school). These reflections often allow the students to open up to me without being face to face with another person, and frequently allow me to have a window into my students' home lives. This also helps them to start thinking about what types of things they need to work on or change if they had a bad week, many of these students would not normally take the time out of the week to reflect, and this is an important tool for when life gets rough. I often take a few minutes out of class to sit and discuss after high school plans with my students. In advanced chemistry, we have only seniors and juniors, many of which have tons of questions about after high school that never get answered. We are able to work out many of their problems, questions, and fears during these times. I Continued...

Amber French

believe that one of the most important aspects of me that benefits the students is my connection with them. I am often able to develop strong classroom relationships with my students. Understanding your students, what interests them, what drives them, and who they are both in and out of school is important and gains me a lot of respect. I care genuinely about each student I have, and because of that, I am able to communicate openly and honestly with each and every one of them. I teach them to be proud of their accomplishments and work and to grow from things that may not have been done as well. Every student brings their own unique strengths and weaknesses to the table, and I like to make sure that those strengths are showcased, and the weaknesses are improved on. In my classroom growth is important both academically and personally.

Colleen T. Chapoton

“I am truly honored to work with students that are creative, inquisitive, thoughtful, and passionate. I go to school every day with a smile on my face because I have the opportunity to see talented students who reflect my passion for science right back at me. Their enthusiasm and excitement for learning fuels my career. Ava- I want to thank you so much for showing me how amazing this world can be. You are a phenomenal person and your spirit shines like the sun. I am so very proud of you!

Kevin W. Langs

“My desire is that every student reaches their potential, no matter what their post-high school plans may be. Each student is important and ‘getting in their mud puddle’ allows me to pour into their lives and help them reach their goals.”

Reggie C. Walters

“Jon is a remarkable young man, continue to push yourself to always learn and continue to enjoy life. As an educator I look for opportunities to connect our math to real life applications, in hope students will recognize how it can create opportunities for them.”

Mark R. Cardwell

“It is a privilege to teach students like Jane, who are committed to ceaseless learning, self-improvement, and personal growth. When students are equally dedicated to their classmates and their school communities, as Jane is, we all benefit. It is an honor to work with such a terrific group of students and, in particular, to be part of recognizing Jane today.”

Anne Flynn

“I want to prepare my students to be lifelong learners. I feel my role as a science teacher is to provide hands-on experiences and opportunities for exploration and questioning that allow students to challenge their thinking. I want my students to “own” their knowledge and be excited for new opportunities to learn.”

Rachel King

“It has been my honor to be a teacher in Vicksburg for so many years. It is my hope that I have helped my students become confident, inquisitive, and positive contributors to our global community.”

Colleen T. Chapoton

“I am truly honored to work with students that are creative, inquisitive, thoughtful, and passionate. I go to school every day with a smile on my face because I have the opportunity to see talented students who reflect my passion for science right back at me. Their enthusiasm and excitement for learning fuels my career. Abdulaziz, Ava, and Ben-I want to thank you so much for showing me how amazing this world can be. You are all strong, inspiring, and phenomenal. You lift me up. I am so very proud of you!”

Gail Nelson

“The inductive and deductive reasoning used in math helps equip students to become problem solvers. In today’s changing and challenging world, one must be willing to take a risk and be able to support an idea. One must also be a team player. Kayla is an amazing student who would visualize problems and solve them often without writing anything on paper. She enjoyed the challenges math presented.”

Martine Goddeyne

“My name is Martine Goddeyne. In 2018, I retired from Portage West Middle School where I taught French. I had the privileged to have Anna Kitagawa as a student in 7th and 8th grade. Anna’s academic achievements are superior but what makes her stand out goes beyond her academic prowess. Anna is hard working, perseverant, independent, creative and a risk taker. At 16, she decided to go study in France and lived there on her own for a while. When she came home, she strived to maintain her fluency; she joined the Alliance Francaise of Kalamazoo and last year, when schools were closed, she organized a French discussion group on Zoom. Anna is very kind and always ready to help others. Anna, I want you to know how much I appreciate you as a student and as a human being. You are one of a kind and you are destined for great things!

Al E. Nieboer

“Congratulations to all of you students receiving this Excellence in Education Scholarship. Your outstanding achievement is due to not only the many gifts and talents you have been blessed with, but also a result of good old hard work. That’s what I have appreciated most about Kyle. Thanks. Kyle for your leadership in my science classes, on our TEAMS team, and on our Quiz Bowl team. You’ve always put in a fantastic effort into everything you’ve done.

Shannon R. Howard

“I hope that I am helping students learn to grow through practice and repetition and to always try to find something positive about whatever task they are doing.”

Dr. Harold T. Swift

“This recognition is all due to the maturation of August O'Neil. I have been blessed to work with many amazing young leaders, but he continues to go above and beyond all expectations. Watching him grow into the young man he is today inspires my hope for the future generation.”

Benjamin B. Brott

“My biggest goal as an educator/coach is to show students how to tie their learning experience from school into the real world. I have enjoyed getting to coach and teach Zach. His hard work ethic, natural talent, and intelligence is a true gift to everything he is involved in. I’m so very proud of you, Zach!”

Amanda H. Szczesny

“Intellectually curious.’ It’s the phrase I reserve for only the most special letters of recommendation, letters for the kinds of students we honor through this program. In educational systems scaffolded and powered by extrinsic motivators, these students have miraculously maintained their sense of wonder about our world. They ask questions threaded with other knowledge, questions without easy answers, questions that lead to more questions...they ask so many questions. As much as we as educators strive and bribe to inspire or coax all our students to seek more answers than are provided by our limited curricula, only a handful will truly engage enough to do it, and their willingness to do so is layered with family encouragement and every teacher’s efforts prior to my own. It is always an honor to be chosen by these fine young people as a ‘significant educator’ when their lives have been clearly touched by so many, but my greatest hope in preparing them for the future is simply in encouraging them to willingly share their curiosity with others--to never give up their desire to seek. They are honored here for their grades, but it is their persistent curiosity that will lead them to success--I truly hope they know that.”

Modhi Alsherhi

“I have taught Anna Buck and Xavier Langsdale advanced math courses for the past three years. Both possess evident curiosity and passion for learning mathematics. Both excelled in all courses taught. Both made teaching rewarding. I always aim to challenge my students and prepare them to be life-long learners.”

Matthew J. Porco

“As a history teacher, I try to get my students to critically examine the past in order to better understand where we are today and to consider the implications for the future. Crucial to this process are students like Kinsey who are willing to work hard and thoughtfully engage in our content and it was an honor to be able to work with her over the course of two full years.”

Kathleen Frink

“It was a pleasure having Kyle Rachowicz in class for two years and I'm honored he chose me as his significant educator. His work ethic and dedication to learning will serve him well in college and beyond.”

James Dennis Young, Jr.

“Education, coaching, parenting, and mentorship have always been an act of service for me. The young people in our care are our greatest gift, and most profound responsibility. The adults that they will become in time are rooted in all that they possess and are nurtured by those who have given of their time and energy.”

Shannon D. Houtrouw

“Congratulations 2021 graduates and Excellence in Education Scholars. I am so blessed and grateful for the opportunity to work with you. You have shown amazing resilience during an unprecedentedly challenging time. You will each go on to do amazing things. I pray that you will keep your humility and a good sense of humor about you as you face even more challenges, anticipated and otherwise. Remember those less fortunate than yourselves. Keep an attitude of gratitude. Check back on the home folks every now and then. God bless!”

Pilar Forero

“While it has been my honor to have Aidan as a student in my class, the truly wonderful part has been coming to know him as a person. With the values of his close-knit family as his foundation, Aidan uses his special gift of being able to inspire and lift those around him, generously sharing his passion for learning with others and supporting them as they reach for their successes. His presence in class creates such a positive ambience and his energy encourages his peers to believe that reaching their goals is possible. As a teacher, I share my passion for learning Spanish and the culture around it with my students each day and build on my students' strengths, using the learning of Spanish to contribute to their development as contributing members of society. My students are truly my inspiration! Thank you, Aidan!”

Peter Santa Maria

“My goal as a teacher to create scientifically literate students that can go on to make informed, evidence-based decisions in the real world. I encourage students to problem solve, think critically, and work with others to create solutions.”

