

APPLICANT INFORMATION FORM

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Lori Zimmerman
Name

6th grade
Current Grade Level(s) Taught

Language Arts
Current Subject(s) Taught

3 years
Years in Current Position

22 years
Total Years of Teaching Experience

Languages Other than English Spoken Fluently

Areas of National Board Certification Achieved or In Progress:

SCHOOL INFORMATION

Woodward Public Schools
School District

Woodward Middle School
School Name

783
School Size

2700
District Size

Public
School Demographic

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

List all below, most recent first.

EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION

College or University	Dates Attended	Degree Earned (i.e., B.A. in Math)
Southwestern Oklahoma St. University	Fall 1988/Spring 89	
Northwestern Oklahoma St. University	1989-1993	BS in Elementary Education
		Endorsement in Early Childhood

Beaver High School	Beaver	Ok	73932
Name of High School Attended	City	State	ZIP Code

EMPLOYMENT RECORD OF SERVICE (Include grade level and/or subject area)

School District	Position Held	Dates
Beaver Public Schools	7th/8th Geography and Science Teacher	1994-1995
	Third Grade Teacher	1998-2006
	5th/6th Grade Math Teacher	2006-2013
Woodward Public Schools	7th Grade Reading Teacher	2013-2017
	5th/6th Grade Language Arts Teacher	2017-present

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS (Include offices held and/or other relevant activities)

Membership	Position Held	Dates
Okla.Ed. Association	member	1994-present
Woodward Ed. Association	member	2013-present
NW Region Advisory Com	member	2018-present
Title One Committee	member	2013-present

LEADERSHIP IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT (Include leadership in the training of future teachers)

Title	Position Held	Dates
Staff Development Comm	Woodward Middle School Representative	2018-present
Mentor Teacher	Mentor teacher for first year teachers	2016-17,2018-19
Book Club/Student Council	Sponsor	2014-17,2014-19
High School Cheer	Assistant Coach	2018-present
Smithsonian Student Trav	Co-Sponsor	2015
GEAR UP	Presenter at State & National Conferences	2017
M.S.E.L.A. Summit	Virtual Conference for Middle School ELA Teachers	2020
Teach Your Heart Out	Virtual Conference with Gerry Brooks	2020
EngageOk in the Cloud	Virtual Conference with State Depart. of Ed.	2020

AWARDS AND OTHER RECOGNITION OF TEACHING

Title	Dates
The Masonic Fraternity of Oklahoma Teacher of Today	2015,2018
Woodward Education Association Good Apple Award	2015,2017
Woodward Education Association Award for Instructional Excellence	2016
Woodward Education Association Teacher of the Month	2018
TV Segment for KFOR-"Is This a Great State or What?" (online teaching during the pandemic)	
Woodward Education Foundation Grants for Teachers recipient:	
"Holocaust/Diversity Speaker"-funded Holocaust survivor speaker for students	2016-2017
"When Students WANT to Read!"-funded new books for teachers' classrooms	2019
Woodward Teacher of the Year	2020

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Limit all following responses to spaces provided.

PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY

What were the factors that influenced you to become a teacher?

Describe what you consider to be your greatest contributions and accomplishments in education.

Growing up, a career in education was never on my “What I want to do when I grow up” radar. I was on track to become a journalist - the Nellie Bly of Northwest Oklahoma! I had big dreams of cracking big news stories, but over time and as maturity began to set in, I came to realize that a journalism career in rural Oklahoma probably wasn't going to be as exciting and fulfilling as I had imagined, so I sought guidance from my mom, a second-generation teacher. Of course, she instantly suggested that I follow in her footsteps and add a third generation of educators to our family. With some trepidation, I took her advice, enrolled in education courses, and never looked back. I hate to admit it, but in this case, mother really *did* know best! I have now been a teacher for twenty-two years, and I love it!

I started my career in Beaver where I convinced community leaders to let me establish the first preK class in the district, Mrs. Z's Zoo. At that time, there were no educational programs for four-year-olds, but I knew they would benefit from some exposure to structured learning and socialization before entering kindergarten. After two years of preK, I transitioned to the public school system teaching science and geography. It was during these early years that I truly recognized the depth of my passion for education and for helping children capture those “Aha” moments. I taught third grade for eight years before moving to fifth and sixth-grade math, which presented entirely new challenges. Children don't typically enjoy math, and it can be difficult to show them the value in arithmetic, but I was determined that they would all enjoy success. To that end, we opened a school supply cart as a class project. The students were tasked with managing the cart as a business. They were required to set and adhere to a budget, finalize sales, and count back change to customers. Not only were they applying their math lessons but they were also learning life skills. More importantly, they were having fun! They relished overseeing

the supply cart and watching our account balance grow. Very early in my career, I understood that this is how all kids need to learn.

After more than a decade of teaching in Beaver, I was ready for a new adventure. I moved to Woodward to tackle seventh-grade reading. There were no resources, no curriculum, and no partner teacher with whom to collaborate. I was starting from scratch, and the only direction I had from the principal was, “Make them fall in love with reading again.” Even though I lacked resources, I was motivated by a burning passion to become the best reading teacher I possibly could be. I delved into planning the year by designing an innovative, active curriculum that would bring reading skills and learning objectives to life. When we read *Daniel’s Story*, I brought in a Holocaust survivor to share his story of endurance in the concentration camps, and we invited parents and the community to our classroom for an evening to browse through our self-made Holocaust Museum. Despite the obstacles I had to overcome that first year as a reading teacher, I thoroughly enjoyed my new role, and I created and nurtured extraordinary bonds with my students.

There are many professional accomplishments of which I am very proud. Twice my colleagues have selected me as the Masonic Lodge Teacher of Today. Two years ago, at the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships Conference in San Francisco, my middle school colleague and I gave a presentation on a curriculum that we had created utilizing peer coaching and other learning concepts we had gained through the GEAR UP programs. I was chosen by my fellow educators to represent Woodward Middle School as a finalist for Woodward’s Teacher of the Year, and now I am representing my community in the state competition. My greatest contributions to education are my passion and my determination to ensure that all children have a positive middle school experience where they feel safe, loved, and valued. I am privileged to mentor a new group of eager students each year, and being their teacher is tremendously rewarding. I absolutely cannot imagine any other career for myself.

PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING

Describe your personal feelings and beliefs about teaching, including your own ideas of what makes an outstanding teacher. Describe the rewards you find in teaching. How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in your personal teaching style?

On a balmy fall day in Beaver, Oklahoma, the third-grade students in Room #2 were shocked to discover that their teacher was missing! In hushed voices, the little scholars shared theories about where she could be. Their lively discussion was short-lived when they realized a big, yellow bus had pulled-up outside the classroom. They eagerly dashed to the window, pressed their faces to the glass, and watched in complete disbelief as the illustrious Ms. Frizzle, clad in a planet-patterned dress, with her red hair pulled into a messy bun, and a friendly lizard perched upon her shoulder, exited the bus and began the trek to Room #2. Was Ms. Frizzle, from the *Magic School Bus* book series, *really* going to be their substitute for the day? They had already read about her magical science adventures, and they were hysterical with excitement to finally meet her and embark on their own adventure on the Magic School Bus!

That was the first of the many times since then that I have dressed up as a character from a book to entice my students into science lessons, and it's absolutely the best way to illustrate my philosophy of teaching, which is very simple: Education should be a fun and magical experience for *everyone*. I have always held firm that lessons should be creative, interactive, and authentic and that a child's education shouldn't be limited to the four walls of a classroom. I refuse to assign a lot of worksheets, and dusty old textbooks will never be found in my classroom. I am an advocate for hands-on projects that appeal to a wide variety of learners. To that end, each winter my students research "Christmas around the World." In small groups, they select a country and explore the Christmas traditions celebrated by the citizens of that country. They create a display and present it to the class, and on the final day of the project, the student groups each cook a traditional holiday dish from their selected country, and we all enjoy a delicious, multicultural holiday feast!

Teaching this way requires extensive planning, resources, and patience, but my students are more mindfully engaged when they are truly immersed in fun learning experiences, so the

extra time, planning, and clean-up are definitely worth the end results!

During project-based learning, the concepts come to life for my students as they are actively engaged and become true participants in their education. At least once each year, I transform my classroom into Mrs. Z's Literary Cafe where each learner is presented with a buffet of books through a menu of book tastings. When studying biographies, we turn the school into a wax museum for the evening. Each student portrays a wax statue of a historical figure, and at the push of a button, the statue becomes animated and provides the audience with interesting biographical information and historical facts. This is a favorite activity for children and parents alike, because when parents are involved in their child's education, everyone wins!

My students and I aren't always riding the Magic School Bus, dining in the Literacy Cafe, or hosting a wax museum. Some days we are actually in the classroom, and on those days, you will find my scholars enjoying the benefits of flexible seating. Three years ago, I tossed-out the seating charts for stationary desks and replaced them with a classroom couch, recliners, bean bags, and a variety of tables and chairs. The relaxed space creates a safe, non-threatening classroom climate where my pupils relish learning in a place where they are most comfortable. In our classroom, my students can solve problems and create collaboratively, freely engaging in critical thinking, which leads to a deeper understanding of the concepts we are studying.

Humor in the classroom is an important part of my philosophy because laughing releases feel-good endorphins, keeps students alert, helps them to enjoy their learning, and makes us all more relaxed and comfortable with each other. It is my goal to provide original learning opportunities and exciting, magical classroom experiences for my students every day. My little scholars deserve a teacher who is passionate about education, and if I'm not enthusiastic enough, I can always call upon Ms. Frizzle for inspiration!

EDUCATION ISSUES AND TRENDS

What do you consider to be the major public education issues we face today? Address them in depth, outlining possible causes, effects, and resolutions.

The challenges that educators face have grown exponentially. Increasing class sizes, insufficient funding resulting in loss of important programs and resources, teacher shortages, and high-stakes testing are all difficult education issues. However, all of these have taken a back seat to the catastrophic Covid-19 pandemic, which has brought the world as we have known it to a screeching halt.

The Covid-19 outbreak in our nation put the teaching profession to the test, as teachers almost overnight had to embrace virtual learning. Yes, we were anxious, but we rallied together because that is what professional educators do when facing a crisis. We immediately began virtual meetings with our co-workers and principals with the goal of developing distance-learning plans that would reach all students. To learn about “best practices” in virtual education, we established an Oklahoma Pandemic Facebook page for teachers across the state so that we could collaborate. My coworker and I met regularly through Google Hangout to plan our lessons, and our sixth grade teachers met once every two weeks to coordinate curriculum. We became a support group for each other, and with smiles on our faces and prayers in our hearts, we embraced the unknown, learned how to utilize Google Hangout, engaged virtually with our students, and enjoyed the shared success with our students.

I admit that I was apprehensive as I waded through online resources and learned how to upload links and turn online short stories into PDF files. My goal was to redesign my units and lessons to add a higher level of interaction and fun. Hoping to make my students feel like they were actually in the classroom with their energetic, enthusiastic teacher, I dug through my closets and storage totes to find silly costumes that I could wear each day during our online class time. Most of my costumes were based on the characters from the stories we were reading. Word of my educational alter egos spread, and attendance in my Google Hangouts grew as my students excitedly anticipated what character I would be the next day. One day I appeared as Miss Viola Swamp to

emphasize characterization, and the next day I donned my cape and mask as Grammar Girl, rescuing students from those tricky parts of speech and monstrous dangling modifiers. The costumes, accompanied by my own theatrics, instantly connected me with my students, and we all had fun while they were learning!

Because my students loved the dress up days so much, I flipped the classroom. I tasked them with selecting a favorite literary character. They were required to research the character, choose three facts about the character, and then join our last video chat dressed as that character. As our parting project, we all played the guessing game.

Of course, interactive teaching required more planning and was definitely labor intensive, but I found that adding a layer of entertainment and fun motivated my students to stay connected with me when they could have chosen to sleep-in or play video games. Some days virtual instruction was definitely challenging, but even though we were all navigating uncharted waters, we were laughing and learning as we went along. Gradually, my students and I discovered that we could adapt to this new “norm” of virtual learning, and we ended the school year successfully.

Over the summer, as I began to fully comprehend the challenges of the pandemic, I started to plan for a classroom that would be completely virtual. I established a virtual library that I uploaded to Google Classroom and developed a parent portal. On the very first day of school in August, I started front loading all of the skills my students needed in order to navigate virtual learning.

Technology skills are necessary, but there are other skills that students need so that they can work independently. Everyday, I am introducing new distance learning skills and modeling and reinforcing independent learning skills. Most of all, I am building relationships with each student so they will know that their needs will be met whether we are together or apart. Even in the middle of a pandemic, I firmly believe that when my students have a craving for the classroom, enjoy what they are learning, and know that I’m their biggest cheerleader, the sky is the limit, and I am ready to help them take flight!

THE TEACHING PROFESSION

What do you do to strengthen and improve the teaching profession?

What is and/or what should be the basis for accountability in the teaching profession?

Teachers should be their students' number one fan. When children feel loved and valued in the classroom, they succeed because they know their teacher will support them and enable them to achieve. This is how I strengthen and improve the teaching profession...by building a meaningful relationship with each and every one of my students. I learned the importance of this very early in my career from Anna, whom I taught in fifth grade.

Anna came from a broken home and had lived with her grandma for some time, but it was far from a supportive environment. A talented singer, Anna longed to be a music teacher and to be the first person from her family to graduate from college, but she needed security and support. Even though she struggled during her school years, I always listened, did not judge or criticize, and helped her work through her problems. I was so proud when she crossed the stage to receive her high school diploma, and for the next few years, I witnessed her metamorphosis into the determined, confident adult I knew she could become. Anna came to live with my family during her student teaching, and again I watched her blossom into the teacher she was meant to be. Over the years, Anna and I have built an enduring friendship, and I am still the cheerleader on the sidelines of her life. Our relationship always reminds me of the power of teachers to change the course of a child's life.

I strengthen and improve the teaching profession by always focusing on my students, however they come to me, and I apply all my tools and talents to gain their trust. I have found that my enthusiasm for relationship-building also impacts my peers. On numerous occasions, my colleagues have told me that my passion and energy is contagious. When I come to school wearing one of my crazy costumes that will become part of my lesson for the day, the teachers and staff join in the fun enthusiastically, and this ignites a kind of positive energy all throughout the day. My colleagues have even participated in my dress up days on different occasions to make learning more fun and engaging for my students and theirs.

As the teacher shortage has increased, many educators have entered the profession with an emergency certification. I cannot imagine stepping into a classroom with no training in classroom management or lesson design and no student teaching experiences to draw upon. These beginners need help, so I became a mentor for an emergency certified teacher, and we worked together every school day during our planning time. We went over the standards and curriculum, and I demonstrated how we bundled the standards in order to deliver instruction. I helped her set up classroom rules and procedures, shared my weekly lesson plans, and explained various strategies to use in the lesson for the day. Most importantly, when she came to observe in my classroom, I demonstrated how to exude energy and enthusiasm when delivering instruction and when interacting with my students. I modeled how to engage the kids while teaching the lesson and shared my love of project-based learning with displays and examples. She adopted much of my teaching style and immediately began to see positive results from her students. Without hands-on mentoring, she would have floundered and so would her students.

Peer coaching is imperative for first year teachers. Without support, new teachers usually leave the profession after the first year. We need to recruit more teachers, but we need to rally around them and help them, not push them through the classroom door and cross our fingers and hope they will make it. Just as we do for our students, we must nurture relationships with all new teachers, become their cheerleaders, and provide whatever support they need, not just in that crucial first year but every year.

Ultimately, I strengthen and improve the teaching profession because I hold myself accountable, an essential part of an effective educator. It is an awesome responsibility to prepare young people for the future. Our value as educators lies in whether or not we constantly examine our actions to ensure that every decision we make not only supports the success of our students but also the educators who are working alongside us. My twenty-two-year career has taught me that success cannot be found in test scores or awards but in continuous self-reflection and in the relationships we build as we travel on this educational journey together.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Describe your commitment to your community through service-oriented activities including volunteer work, civic responsibilities, and other group activities.

Helen Keller once said, “Alone we can do so little; together, we can do so much.” I feel a huge responsibility to model the reality of a servant’s heart for my own children and for the students in my classroom.

Serving as the Woodward Middle School Student Council sponsor, every year at Christmas, we volunteer to be bell ringers for the Salvation Army and to serve as greeters at Woodward’s annual Crystal Christmas. Working with local professional organizations provides another outlet to support my community. Each year I serve with the Woodward Education Association to gather stuffed animals for our local hospital. These “Boo Hoo Buddies” are given to children who are having surgery or receiving emergency medical services. During the cold winter months, I collect children’s pajamas with Professional Oklahoma Educators, which we distribute throughout the district to children in need.

When we moved to Woodward several years ago, my family and I were eager to become active in the local theater. My son was passionate about the performing arts, and we wanted to nurture his enthusiasm. Now, while my son is performing on stage, I can be found behind the scenes in the sewing room and in the box office. I make costumes, build stage sets, paint backdrops, assist the stage manager, sell tickets, and cue the curtain. If there is a Swiss Army knife of the theater world, I am it!

The Woodward Public Schools has participated in the Regional Food Bank’s Backpack Program for many years. Since enrollment doubled in March, I have been volunteering by unloading the backpack food, packing the backpacks, and handing them out to the kids.

Educators honor the deep commitment to the communities we serve. During these past months, as we have encouraged our students and supported and shared with each other, we have found a way to forge ahead into this brave new world. Helen Keller was absolutely correct- together we can do so much!

OKLAHOMA TEACHER OF THE YEAR

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

On the first day of school, I always present my students with two questions: What do you think it will take to make this year a smashing success, and what do you expect from me as your teacher? A conversation ensues, and as the children discuss and share, I serve as their scribe, recording their goals and expectations on the whiteboard. I then reveal my personal commitments to my students: I will encourage and enable you to reach your goals; I will be firm but compassionate; We will have fun; I will respect you so that you can understand what a powerful lifeforce respect can be; I will build a unique relationship with each of you. From the first day, I want my students to learn is that each of them is important to me, and that I value their input.

If chosen as the Oklahoma Teacher of the Year, the message I will convey is the importance of finding ways to connect with students and then nurturing those connections. Unfortunately, many students do not have an adult with whom they share a safe, caring relationship. Because of this, it is my aim to ensure that every child who walks through my door feels genuinely valued and loved. They need to understand that they can come to me for anything and that I will listen and try my best to help them with any problem or concern they may face. All classrooms are populated both with students who receive sparse support from home and with students whose parents support them in every way possible. But all children, no matter the quality of their home life, crave to be treated as though they belong, and I will take as much time as is needed in order to establish a safe, accepting climate where everyone feels equally valued. When students feel a sense of belonging and trust, their personal walls melt away, and real learning begins. Content learning is important, but it can't be the first. Relationship building must be established first and then nurtured. My message as Oklahoma Teacher of the Year would be to encourage every teacher to take the time to authentically connect with their students. By reaching out and earning their trust, a teacher can impact a child's life forever. It is an awesome honor to be named the Teacher of the Year, but for all of my students, I want to be the teacher of a lifetime.

SHARE A LESSON

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

I'm always up for a challenge, and designing the Holocaust Unit during my first year at Woodward Middle School certainly proved to be one.

During the summer months I began researching ideas for a unit that would be project-based and interdisciplinary, and I chose the Holocaust. Next my co-worker and I attended a summer institute on Holocaust Education at the Jewish Federation of Tulsa. The extensive research and varied curriculums were amazing, so that's when I decided to include all disciplines and expand the unit school wide. I convinced all 7th-grade teachers to join me in this new endeavor.

First, we applied for and received a grant that would allow us to pay for a guest speaker whose Jewish parents survived the war. Then we began brainstorming on how each subject could contribute. We decided to create a timeline of Holocaust events from 1933-1945, with each core subject depicting a part of the timeline. Working in small groups, the students created projects to illustrate their particular part of the timeline: miniature ghettos, death camps, a depiction of a train ride to a death camp, bar graphs and charts displaying the number of deaths per day, and silhouettes/profiles of the Holocaust victims. Some of the drama class students did battle reenactments from WWII and recreated certain scenes from the books *Night* and *Daniel's Story*. We transformed our library into an interactive Holocaust Museum and invited the community to tour our museum and listen to our guest speaker, Michael Korenblit. Our students poured themselves into their projects. Even my most reluctant learners excelled in this unit because they were able to apply their creativity and ingenuity.

Students are personally impacted by the Holocaust because the lessons of the Holocaust are vast and profound. This lesson defines me as a teacher because I seek out those opportunities that allow my students to work both independently and collectively in order to reach a goal. I believe that a big part of my job as an educator is to encourage the students to believe in their capabilities and then enable and guide them on their journey to success.

May 8th, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

When Lori Zimmerman burst onto the scene at Woodward Middle School, I was the first member of the faculty she met. We were the only two working in our building that day. School had not yet begun; in fact, it was weeks away. But Lori, being the enthusiastic, dedicated professional she is, was not about to let any grass grow under her feet. She had taken on a new role at a new school and was determined to jump in with gusto. From that day forward we became not only colleagues but friends. As a result, I have witnessed first hand her instructional effectiveness and classroom engagement, as well as the relationship she builds with her students.

Mrs. Zimmerman was my son's seventh-grade reading teacher. Much to my chagrin, he was a self-proclaimed "non-reader." Not only did Lori place books in his hand that he did not want to put down, but she also hooked him on reading books in series, which he had never done before. As a result, his confidence grew, as did his reading skills. No other teacher has impacted my son's desire to read as she did. What a gift she was to him in that area.

Last spring, one of our Woodward Middle School students passed away quite suddenly as a result of bacterial meningitis. Zain was a former WMS Student Council member of Lori's, and their relationship continued to grow through local theater productions. She was also a current Student Council and Academic Team member of mine. Our faculty and student body were quite shaken and overcome by her death. Full of life and creativity, Zain's unbridled energy, passion, and larger-than-life personality could sometimes be a lot to embrace. But Lori "spoke" Zain. She knew how to love her. She knew how to connect with her. She knew how to channel that energy productively. Of Zain's teachers, Lori and I were the two requested by the family to rush to Oklahoma Baptist Hospital in her last hours. Her mother spoke of the impact Lori had made on their precious daughter and wanted us to have the opportunity to say goodbye as they prepared to remove Zain from life support. While in that hospital room, I watched as Lori held Zain's hand, spoke soft words to her, said things that would have made Zain erupt into laughter, and I watched her weep. I saw as she offered the ministry of presence to Zain's family during their time of grief and pain. I was there as she loved them, sat with them, and bowed in prayer with them. What a blessing. What a gracious, generous gift Zain's family extended to Lori, by inviting her to share in that heart-wrenching, beautiful moment of their beloved girl leaving this world. I cannot conceive a higher honor for an educator. Lori Zimmerman left a tremendous imprint on that precious soul in this life, and Zain left one on hers that will live on forever in Lori.

What Lori gives her students in the way of academia, compassion, and personal connection, she also gives in her energy, creativity, and humor. Always incorporating engaging activities and fun projects into her classroom instruction, this aspect of her teaching methods has not changed during our current distance-learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we moved to online instruction during the last quarter of this school year, both Lori and I dressed up in crazy, outlandish costumes so as to lure our students into online engagement. We posted pictures of our zany creations on social media and received tremendous feedback. As a result, we both ended up being featured in a segment of "Is This A Great State Or What?" on KFOR Channel 4. I cannot adequately express the pride and joy I have in being on television with my dear friend, doing something we both enjoy because of the love we have for our profession, and most importantly, for our students. There are no bounds to the lengths Mrs. Z will go to in order to reach her beloved students.

Because we have been dear colleagues for many years, there are numerous other stories and anecdotes I could share. These reasons alone are why Lori is qualified to be deemed Oklahoma Teacher of the Year. That prestigious title cannot possibly be bestowed as a result of degrees obtained, nor certifications earned. It must be awarded based on the educator's passion for the profession, love for and connection to students, and dedication to constantly pushing them toward success. This is what makes a worthy, honorable educator, and this is Lori Zimmerman.

Sincerely,

Sonya Covalt

8th ELA

Student Council Sponsor

WPOE President

Woodward Middle School



Woodward Public Schools

Dear Oklahoma State Teacher of the Year Selection Committee:

Former Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry said, "A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning." Reading this quote recently I immediately thought of Lori Zimmerman. Her passion and dedication to the education profession is truly inspiring. During the recent school shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, Lori immediately stepped up her game by donning a different costume every day to drive up student engagements over Google Meet. Her efforts not only captured the students' attention but also put her in the spotlight of the "Is This a Great State or What?" television show.

Lori Zimmerman certainly pushes the envelope of innovative educational practices. When you walk into her classroom, you do not see rows of chairs or some sort of symmetrical arrangement. Couches, comfy chairs, and tables are scattered all over the room, and the creative energy can be felt immediately. A traditionalist would wonder how in the world anything gets done! A brief classroom observation gives you a glimpse of the genius behind her methods as you see students engaged, collaborating, asking questions, and clearly learning. That genius is evident in the students' learning without realizing it because they are so engaged.

Another very critical skill that Mrs. Zimmerman has demonstrated is differentiated instruction. We all know the Henry Ford model of assembly-line instruction has affected the traditional public school model we are so familiar with; yet, we also know that humans do not grow and learn in assembly-line fashion. Mrs. Zimmerman seems to innately understand this conundrum and is able to differentiate her instruction to maximize growth opportunities for every student.

In our district, we have adopted the mantra "All Means All." We believe that we have a personal and professional obligation to do our very best to see that every single student will succeed. Indeed, this is a lofty goal, yet Mrs. Zimmerman lives this value every day. She sees that student who is "falling through the cracks" or struggling with personal issues every day, and she sees an opportunity to lift them up and help them find direction. She knows no personal sacrifice too great when attending to the needs of students.

I have had the distinct pleasure to work with some of the very best educators in the business in my twenty-five years in education. Even better, I have the distinct pleasure of working with Mrs. Zimmerman, a teacher-leader in this district for a number of years. She was born to do what she does, and we are so fortunate that she teaches in our school. Without hesitation or reservation, I would like to add my recommendation for Mrs. Lori Zimmerman as a candidate for the Oklahoma State Teacher of the Year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyle B. Reynolds".

Kyle B. Reynolds
Superintendent, Woodward Public Schools

May 11, 2020

Oklahoma Teacher of the Year Selection Committee:

I am writing this letter regarding Mrs. Lori Zimmerman, middle school teacher at Woodward Public Schools. I find it a privilege to speak with you on her behalf.


My role as Education Coordinator with the Oklahoma GEAR UP grant in partnership with Woodward Public Schools has allowed me to work very closely with Mrs. Zimmerman for the past five years. Lori is eager to serve on any coalition or committee, especially when it is in the best interest of students. She brings fresh ideas, hard work and leadership to any group in which she is involved. Her willingness to learn causes others around her to become their best as well. Her positive attitude is one that helps others to follow her in the journey to become a better teacher. There is no doubt that Oklahoma GEAR UP's partnership with Woodward Middle School has benefitted due to Mrs. Zimmerman's involvement.

Mrs. Zimmerman is always eager to hone her craft. She has participated in many professional learning events that OK GEAR UP has hosted. She has taken an impactful role with Professional Learning Communities by leading her teaching team, serving on Guiding Coalitions, and attending PLC Institutes to help further the mission that All Means All. She believes that all kids can learn and she does everything in her power to ensure that each child in her classroom does just that. For example, during the COVID19 Pandemic, I have witnessed her go the extra mile in reaching not only every student but their parents as well. Every day she brought her English/Language Arts classroom to life by dressing up as a character to draw the attention of her students, making learning fun and exciting. Seeing Mrs. Zimmerman in character on Facebook as Cruella De Vil, the Book Fairy, a Mad Scientist, the Cat in the Hat, or Viola Swamp allowed learning to continue during such a scary and uncertain time. Mrs. Zimmerman gave students and adults alike the confidence that even though the school doors were closed, learning would continue because she would lead the way. She gave her students happiness and normalcy when they needed it most. This dedication to her students and the teaching profession is exactly why she was chosen as Woodward's District Teacher of the Year.

In closing, I want to relay that I have witnessed many educators in my twenty-two years in education. Many of them care about kids. Others care about content. Lori Zimmerman cares about both. She takes her witty, happy personality and intertwines both care and content in her teaching every day and that is what we need in education. We need more Lori Zimmermans.

Please consider Mrs. Zimmerman for our Oklahoma Teacher of the Year. She exemplifies what education in our state is. She deserves this honor. If you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 405-225-9285 or lynnew@osrhe.edu.

Respectfully,



Education Specialist, OK GEAR UP

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education