Celebrating True Texas Heroes
Texas Teacher of the Year 2014

Region 10
Region Service Center

ELEMENTARY
Elementary or Secondary

Rockwall ISD ID# 199901
District Name and ID number

2014 Candidate Application Form

I. General Information and signatures

Nominee: First/Last Name Julie Woodard

INFORMATION REDACTED

Educator Certification Program ☐ Regular ☒ **Alternative**
Major Subject Area **Social Studies / Language Arts**
Total Years of Teaching Experience **12 Years**

Area of Certification **Elementary 1-8**
Grade Level **6th Grade**
Years in Present Position **2 Years**

I hereby give my permission that any or all of the attached materials or photos that may be taken of me can be shared with persons interested in promoting, in a variety of media, the National and Texas Teacher of the Year Programs.

Signature of Nominee Julie Woodard.

Principal: First/Last Name J. Renee Demianovich

Principal's e-mail address renee.demianovich@rockwallisd.org Phone # (972)772-1177

Signature of Principal J. Renée Demianovich

District Superintendent First/Last Name Jeff Bailey

Superintendent's e-mail address jeff.bailey@rockwallisd.org Phone # (972) 771.0605

Signature of Superintendent Jeff Bailey

The deadline for the full application to be received at your ESC office is 5 p.m., Friday, June 14, 2013.
**10 point minimum font size. Please reference nomination rules for complete instructions

ESC NOTE: The **cover sheet** (page one of the application) is due at the ESC by **5 p.m. on May 31, 2013**. This two week lead time prior to the receipt of completed applications (June 14, 2013) allows contact time with TOY Contacts, districts, schools, and teachers that may be having problems or issues with the application process.

NOTE: For contact purposes, it would be helpful if the principal would provide a **personal (at-home) e-mail address** should contact need to be made during the summer months. Home E-Mail: _____.

II. EDUCATIONAL HISTORY and PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Educational History

2009	English as a Second Language	Lifetime Certification
2007	Gifted and Talented	Certification
2002-2005	Texas A&M- Commerce	Master of Elementary Education
1987	Geriatric Heath Services Degree	Michigan State University
1977-1981	Western Michigan University	Bachelor of Science

Teaching Employment History

Current	6th grade SS	D.S. Pullen Elem.
2011-2012	6th grade LA and SS	D.S. Pullen Elem.
2010-2011	4th grade ELAR and SS	D.S. Pullen Elem.
	ROCK Spanish Teacher	Kym Collichio/RISD ROCK
	Summer School	Pre-K Bilingual
2009-2010	4th grade ELAR and SS	D.S. Pullen Elem.
	Adult Ed./Teaching of English	Becky Peurifoy/Parent Center
	Summer School	4th grade
2008-2009	4th grade ELAR and SS	D.S. Pullen Elem.
	Summer School	4th grade
2007-2008	4th grade ELAR and SS	D.S. Pullen Elem.
	Summer School	4th grade
2006-2007	4th grade LA and SS	D.S. Pullen Elem.
2005-2006	4th grade LS and Math	D.S. Pullen Elem.
2004-2005	4th grade LS and Math	D.S. Pullen Elem.
2003-2004	4th grade self-contained	D.S. Pullen Elem.
2002-2003	4th grade self-contained	D.S. Pullen Elem.
2001-2002	6th grade LA	D.S. Pullen Elem. - H. Dobbs
1999-2002	Bilingual Substitute/Long Term Sub	Dobbs Elem.

Professional Association Memberships

Member	**Current**	RISD Education Foundation	New Board Member
Member	**Current**	RISD Cultivating Cultural Capacity	Committee Member
Member	**Current**	International Museum of Cultures	Advisory Board
Educ. Chair	2006-2009	Rockwall Community Playhouse	Board of Directors

Staff Development Leadership Activities

Oct. 2012	Guest Lecturer	Using Drama to Inspire Learning	Tamu-C Interns	D. Lee	TAMU-C
2010-2011	Mentor	Student DBU Interns	RISD/DBU	S. Sharp	RISD
2009-2010	Mentor	Student DBU Interns	RISD/DBU	S. Sharp	RISD
May 2010	Coordinator	Intern Interview Event	Tamu-C Interns	Dr. M. Boggs	TAMU-C
Aug. 2009	Instructor	Wonderful World of WIKI	RISD Tech. Conf.	D. Fisher	RISD
July 2009	Instructor	Write Traits Intro. and Refresher	Rockwall ISD	R. Wasson	RISD
2008-2009	Mentor	Student Tamu-Commerce Intern	RISD/Tamu-C	M. Mason	RISD
2007-2008	Mentor	Student Tamu-Commerce Intern	RISD/Tamu-C	M. Mason	RISD
Nov. 2006	Guest Lecturer	Creating Thematic Lessons	Tamu-C Interns	Dr. P. Linder	TAMU-C
2005-2006	Mentor	Student Tamu-Commerce Intern	RISD/Tamu-C	M. Mason	RISD
Oct. 2005	Guest Lecturer	Creating Thematic Lessons	Tamu-C Interns	Dr. P. Linder	TAMU-C
Sept. 2004	Instructor	Strategies for Teaching High Achievers/GT Update		Region 10	
Oct. 2003	Guest Speaker	BEST Teacher Training	Rockwall ISD	M. Mason	RISD
Aug. 2002	Panel Member	Teacher Education Development Task Force The Rockwall ISD representative for the creation of 4-8 Certification			TAMU-C

Awards and Other Recognition

May 2013	RISD Teacher of the Year	District	Rockwall ISD
Fall 2012	Rockwall Education Foundation We All Bleed; Culture through Connection I authored grant to provide all 6th grade students in RISD the opportunity to value cultural diversity while celebrating cultural similarities.	Grant Recipient	$4640.00 Author
Spring 2009	Rockwall Education Foundation Science Alive: Outdoor Learning Center Written in collaboration with peers, the goal of this grant was to provide outdoor learning opportunities for students in all content areas and throughout school.	Grant Recipient	$3017.92 Collaborator

III. PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY

"Good morning, Jake. My name is Mrs. Woodard. I will be your Weekday School teacher this year. We are going to get sticky and gloppy, noisy and silly, even messy and slimy. We are going to learn a lot this year. Are you ready?"

When little Jake smiled at me, picking up his freshly sharpened crayon, I knew this was going to be a great gig. What I didn't know was that becoming a teacher would bring out a passion, a curiosity, and a dedication in me that I never knew existed. With just one crayon, one week of lesson plans, and one 3-year old ready to learn, I was hooked. And the excitement hasn't faded.

Just weeks before I met Jake, my husband, our four children and I, moved to Texas on the day before the start of the RISD school year in 1997. We did not know a soul in the entire state and picked Rockwall to live after my children had a personal interview with Dr. James Bingham. Convinced that if the current Superintendent of Schools would sit down with a 3-year old, 5th, 7th, and 8th grader and honestly and openly answer their questions about the district and its opportunities for them, we knew this was going to be a great fit. The children started school, my husband went to work, and I began considering my employment options.

After nearly 20 years of working in administration in the Geriatric Health Care profession: Activity Consultant, Alzheimer's Adult Care Director, Assisted Living Executive Director, Hospice Volunteer and Program Coordinator, I believed teaching would provide a grand opportunity to work with a younger population. I started with Weekday School at First Baptist Church of Rockwall and, being a true Michigander, it 'snowballed' from there. Encouragement from district teachers and administrators, and all my delightful 3-year olds led me to earn a Texas Teaching Certificate and a Master's Degree in Elementary Education through CORE, the RISD and TAMU-C collaborative effort.

Now in my 12th year of RISD teaching, I couldn't be happier with the experience. Over the years, I've designed some opportunities for students that address the whole child. Being mindful that each child needs to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged, I've created avenues to meet these basic learning needs: Friday Morning Walking Club, Learning from Leaders, Knitting for Knowledge, Writers for Fighters, Leadership Today, Pen Pals Plus and Book Club Buddies are just a few activities I've made available to my students. During the 2012 RISD Memorial Day Celebration,

Writers for Fighters shared their experiences with writing our nation's servicemen and women and read a letter they had received in response. Participating in the 2013 SSO Day, writers shared what it means to write from their heart while collecting supportive letters from the RISD community. U.S. Army Col. Thurman shared, "...you have proven to me that patriots come in all shapes and sizes".

Active participation in district events has taken me to Austin, as the teacher participant in the PTA Summer 3-Day Institute, to UIL competitions as a successful coach each year since 2004-2005, and to numerous SSO, multi-cultural and celebratory district programs.

On campus, my great delight comes in collaboration with my peers in designing integrated lessons and learning amongst the grade levels. This year, activities like Valentine Heart Cards with Kindergarten, Rangoli floor art and World Water Day with 1st. African Music and Map Pals with 2nd, and Chinese New Year with the entire campus, promote not only an appreciation for global diversity, but foster relationships between the campus 6th graders and the younger students of Pullen.

Additionally, I have a passion for sharing. As the RISD Mentor Teacher to numerous interns, residents, student teachers, and classroom observers over the years, I have enjoyed passing on successful teaching tips, lessons, activities, and resources. I've published teaching resources and shared them with current faculty from K-6 and treasure the opportunity to see my work throughout our campus and others. A friend, co-worker, and inclusion teacher often working with me in my classroom repeatedly shares, "Julie, when you grow up, you should teach teachers how to be teachers." I know I'm not done growing. I treasure the learning every day.

Fourteen years after starting this gig called 'teaching', I'm still painting the playground, glazing hand-made globes, and in general making ginormous classroom messes. My students walk into class saying, "Oooh, what a mess! We must be learning a lot today!" I hope my contribution has been providing a healthy, safe, engaging, supportive and challenging environment for my students. I hope I've inspired a love of learning and a passion for excellence. I believe my accomplishments are my students; well-prepared, supported, encouraged, confident, life-long learners that are ready to face their future with problem solving tools that come from hands-on learning and understanding by doing.

Now, on Sunday mornings, from my 3-year old class, I am thrilled to say, "Good morning, Jake" to the Teacher of 4-year olds across the hall from me, who is still using crayons.

IV. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

"Each little thing you do for others makes a big difference." – Me

Many professionals add an inspirational quote to their signature that says a little about themselves or their thinking. The simple quote above has been on my personal email address signature for a while now and as I was thinking about writing the response to this question, I realized how much this quote speaks to what has happened in my teaching career and also in some outstanding ways this year.

COMMUNIITY – **The VOICE Newspaper** Editorial Columnist 1985-86

-wrote column in support of the elderly and the struggles they faced as their lives changed

Blue Water Hospice Patient Care Advocate/Editor 1986-1998

-helped 16 souls leave this Earth in comfort and peace and was Editor of the organization publication, Vital Signs.

First Baptist Church Sunday School and VBS Teacher 1999-**current**

-assorted roles over the years: missions, music, instruction: currently 3's teacher and 2's VBS teacher

Instructor Magazine Scholastic Article contributor 2004

Rockwall Community Playhouse Board Member/Education Chair 2006-2009

-connected theater to the classrooms and students to theater education and shared its role in child development.

Rockwall Summer Musicals Musical Costumer 2012

GLOBAL - **Operation Christmas Child** Shoe Box for Children provider 2000-**current**

USO Donations and event hostess 2003-**current**

Writers for Fighters Creator and Student Sponsor 2011-**current**
-student sponsor of organization that writes letters of encouragement, support and appreciation to our nation's servicemen and women. We mail a box filled with 'letters from home" each month abroad or to first responders.

Writers for Fighters Pullen Children Helping Afghan Children 2013
-in response to a request from ISAF, (International Security Assistance Force) students collected Over the Counter Medications and Writers for Fighters sent them to the ISAF whose mission is to protect the medics treating the local children. In this way, local Pullen children were able to actively help Afghan children across the globe.

CASE German Exchange Student 2011-2012
(Cultural Academic Student Exchange Program) C.hiara Timbone
-my husband and I provided a host family home for a 10th grade student attending our local high school
-return visit from exchange student to our home is scheduled for this fall **October 2013**

United Through Reading Classroom Connection 2012-**current**
-collect donations of children's' literature for the U.S. Military to read, record and send to children stateside

CURE Walking for Cure Organizer 2012-**current**
-student sponsor of Walking for Cure, 6th grade Global Community Service Project, during which campaign students earned $1515, enough to provide surgery that will allow three children in our world to walk. Rockwall Mayor, David Sweet, visited the 6th grade class to congratulate them on this globally-minded relief effort.

My community involvement extends from serving my family and local community to serving a global community and is a very significant part of who I am, both as a person and as an educator. My personal goal is to make a difference in the lives of others, and as a teacher, to connect my students' learning to our changing world.

V. PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING

I believe in the 3 R's of Education: Rigor, Relevance and Relationships. I believe in teaching to the whole child and I believe that rolling up your sleeves, dipping your hands in the dough, and getting paint on your shirt, is the best way to help students learn. I believe in meeting kids in the morning, at lunch, afterschool, or on my WIKI page to forge relationships that keep them wanting to learn and willing to investigate new and deeper understandings. I believe in success and I believe it comes not from being spoon-fed information, but from seeking it out and understanding that, "Ahhhhaa, I found it" moment when a passion for learning and a desire for knowledge kicks in and drives us forward. That's what I believe.

To make all that happen, I strive to combine planning, research, commitment, dedication, caring, and lots of exciting creativity with policy, procedures, practice, preparation and an organized chaos to encourage and promote genuine, authentic student learning that meets the diverse learning styles of my 6th graders and those students we collaborate with.

Being Mrs. Persnickety, as my students sometimes refer to me, I strive to maintain a course Rigor that is age-SE-skill driven. In holding students accountable to the standards, they do rise to the challenge and grow in ways even they hadn't expected.

Being blessed to teach Contemporary World Cultures this year and last, making learning Relevant is fantastically rewarding for my students and me. I have been able to design lessons about people groups, their governments, economies, religions, geographies and cultures in a way that provides relevance to my own students. From Russian Egg folk-painting to a presidential iMovie campaign speech, and from a live Caribbean Reggae Band to mapping with coffee beans, students are afforded the opportunity to make connections to the learning with their own glue-covered hands. From technologically-current Socrative and Quizlet applications on the student iPADS to the ancient art of calligraphy painting, 6th grade Social Studies students make the connection to their learning. From recreating the art of the masters on 2-inch canvases to working in collaboration with first grade to create a rice and flower Rangoli design on our school floor, my students are learning first-hand the applicability of the lessons in which they participate. I agree with Benjamin Franklin when he says, "*Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.*"

I believe nothing is more important in education than Relationship building. Relationships with students, parents, and peers on and off-campus make the learning goals attainable and significant. Working in collaboration with Kindergarten, first, and second grades has been frequent this year and beneficial to all students involved. This cooperative planning and sharing has led to lessons that are designed not only to increase knowledge and understanding, but to foster relationships that deepen that comprehension.

Additional relationships that I am passionate about include my outreach to the U.S. Military in ways that support education. A partnership with United Through Reading pairs my classroom with U.S. Military personnel who read children's books aloud and send them to school children in the states. Writers for Fighters has directly impacted not only classroom lessons, but nurtured valuable life lessons beyond the scope of a single classroom, encompassing the school, local and global community.

I am rewarded each time I check my WIKI page and read the Comments from my students, or find a delicious apple on my desk. My team and I were rewarded when a student with profound speech and learning challenges spoke clearly, eloquently and proudly while introducing his friend, the "navy person" to his classmates. I was rewarded when my students very thoughtfully chose children in our world to lend support to and then raised over $1500 in less than two weeks by walking for them. And, as with any passionate teacher, our greatest reward comes in the smiles, hugs, appreciation, learning, growth, and maturing of our "kids" to be all they thought they could be and more. Those "I did it…", "Wowzah…", and "That was easier than I thought…" comments keep us keeping on.

Design Thinking, a current trend in forward-thinking education, best describes my style: an approach to learning where students find solutions to real-world problems by experimentation. Roll up your sleeves, get dirty, squeeze the glue, chart the coordinates, paint the continents, and learn - a genuine, honest, sticky learning. My personal teaching style is messy, very messy. Classroom management is not a problem because my students are too authentically engaged in the process of learning, or too deep in the creation of a product, to be distracted by off-task behaviors. Purposefully planning my days, carefully designing my lessons, and creating activities that draw students into the learning is my style. I may be on the custodial management bad list, but my students believe in me. More importantly, I believe in them.

VI. EDUCATION ISSUES AND TRENDS

"*What is a return address?*" I was asked recently by a sophomore in college who was completing an application for an internship in his chosen field. "*I can't tell what time it is on that kind of clock,*" explained a nervous senior while lining up for commencement services. "*Of course a pound of books weighs more than a pound of feathers. I'm not an idiot.*"

No. These students are not idiots. They are all main-stream 'successful' students who passed classes, excelled on standardized tests, and were promoted from grade to grade. But educating our youth is more than data. I'd like to see it about learning – relevant, real-world learning that is not taught autonomously from life and the world we live in, but as part of it.

There are several issues facing public education today. Curriculum concerns coupled with the current political environment create confused and very cautious citizens. Staff and student safety in schools is a growing nation-wide challenge. Over half of the student population of Texas site Spanish as their home language, yet less and less schools have bi-lingual programs. Clear paths to determining teacher accountability and assessing student success are ongoing struggles. But the graduation of students in increasing numbers that cannot fill the jobs our country offers and cannot complete the applications to acquire them is terrifying. Texas educators need to be collaboratively committed to the education of our students in a way that will prepare them for life. This is critically important to our nation as a whole, to our great state and to each and every individual student whom we are charged to teach.

Possible contributing factors leading to less qualified graduating students could range from educator apathy to decreases in funding. As classrooms become more and more crowded, and educators are faced with increasing responsibilities, quality of instruction is likely to suffer. Specialists working as Reading Coaches, Bi-lingual Educators, Gifted Instructors or Technology Trainers are being removed from the schools due to budget cuts. This forces classroom education to become closer to one-size-fits-all. We all recognize that differentiation helps to address the varied learning styles, needs, and interests of classroom students, but by removing specialized staff, actual student learning decreases, despite the best efforts toward successful differentiation. Individual student needs are not always being met. Classroom teachers with increasing responsibilities, inconsistent accountability measures, and less

and less help from specialists are letting kids move on, graduate, or be "placed", that are not ready and have no right to be. Parents are able to sign off on retention recommendations and students continue to graduate unable to tell time and unable to secure one of the many jobs available in our country.

In order to resolve this challenge, I think we need to take a good hard look at increasing Rigor and Relevance without Ruining Relationships. In fact, I'd like to write or speak someday on this very topic. In my opinion the bar has been set way too low. Mediocre is okay. Late work is accepted. Test re-takes are commonplace. I do not believe that is raising Rigor. I would like to suggest an education system where the role of the teacher shifts dramatically to one of a learning facilitator. I'd like to see more interdisciplinary learning that makes learning relevant. Facts, figures, and formulas in a classroom are not helping students learn real-world concepts. I'd like to see Relationships with professionals working in conjunction with educators to make the learning relevant. I've designed lessons using Jenga blocks that students have labeled with the Factors of Production: land, labor, capital and entrepreneurship. The kids, of course, build a tower with the blocks. Then as we speak with our German exchange student about the economy of Germany and begin to pull out "land" blocks because industrial Germany is nearly land-locked, or speak with parents of students who are missionaries to Ecuador and Guatemala, we remove "entrepreneurship" and "capital" blocks until the students see how an economy crumbles and falls apart without all the factors present. Additionally, Sgt. Weilbrenner of the U.S. Army communicated with my students while he was in Afghanistan as an ISAF member about the terrain, the equipment, the weather, and the needs of the young Afghan children he was entrusted to protect. He sent photos for our class predictions and discussions during our 6th Social Studies CSCOPES lessons on the government, history, geography, economy and culture of Afghanistan. When a teacher steps away from "teaching" and becomes a learning facilitator who makes and finds connections and relationships for his or her students, then the students authentically connect to the study and that is when real learning takes place.

I believe that through raising Rigor and Relevance by building Relationships that promote interdisciplinary, collaborative, relevant learning, eventually students graduating from Texas' schools will be able to read any clock on graduation day and also be able to articulately share a personal story about their own education successes.

VII.THE TEACHING PROFESSION

I believe that the single most significant way to strengthen and improve the art of teaching is collaboration. In my world, with my students, the examples of collaboration are abundant and in some cases, life-changing. From parents to global partners, relationship building fosters student success.

Throughout my teaching career, I have felt it important to partner with parents. Valuable lessons and helpful insights come from inviting parents into the classroom to share their expertise, their time or their talents with students. Parents get an inside glimpse of the profession of teaching and share a respect in the community for the special work we, as teachers, do on a daily basis.

At least monthly, I collaborate with peers teaching the same class. By sharing ideas, lessons, and resources we are strengthening the quality of all our teaching. Nearly, as often, I work in partnership with teachers on my campus, by planning, creating and implementing lessons across the grade levels, for example, Rangoli art with 1st grade, or World Water Day celebrations with 1st and 2nd grades.

Collaborating with people around the globe has been especially helpful to me as a Contemporary World Cultures Teacher. Recently, several efforts to improve the teaching profession by working with the U.S. Military have led to amazing stories of both student success, and life-changing opportunities. For example, I recently was able to request a Face Time phone call from a U.S. Navy sailor aboard the USS Mahan, currently stationed in the Mediterranean Sea. A student was researching the Navy and its 'jobs" for a Math assignment. Having profound speech and learning challenges, I felt that getting a call from abroad would help him to be successful with this project. It proved to be much, much more. The phone call from Souda Bay, Crete, 6730 miles away, sent our 13-year-old into learning overdrive. He took the phone to his Math classroom and very, very articulately introduced the sailor to his classmates using complete, very informative sentences. And, maybe more importantly, somehow, his speech was clear and distinct. Baffled students understood every word. From that call on, nearly a month ago, a sad and lonely boy, a bit outcast and very academically challenged, has blossomed into a driven, highly motivated, engaged young man who, though his profound speech challenges have returned, his quest for knowledge and incessant drive to improve have never left him.

Additionally, during the very same phone call from the Mediterranean waters, the sailor on board amazed us all by sharing another example of what collaboration can do. As a recent recipient of

a box of letters from Writers for Fighters, the crew had hung the letters on the mess decks for all to see. In doing so, FC2 Falcon discovered the letters had been sent from his own home town! So, from over 6700 miles away, FC2 Falcon also talked to a class at Pullen Elementary that day as they all wished him love and following seas from his hometown. It was truly a "letters from home" moment.

Globally, my students and I just concluded an effort of collaboration that has a real life-changing outcome. We chose Cure.org as our 6th grade Global Community Service partner and two weeks ago mailed a check for $1515.00. This will provide surgery for three children: Junior, Andy and Abigael who all live in Kenya. These real children living in our world will now have surgery because we chose to collaborate and complete a pledge walk earning donations for those who cannot walk.

How do I aim to strengthen the teaching profession? Through collaboration with students, faculty on and off my campus, parents, and professionals of all walks of life who can share with and improve the education of my students. By modeling these relationships myself, and sharing the positive impact that working together create, I hope to have fellow educators choose this path as well.

We are all, as teachers, accountable to our students and all their unique needs. Teaching to the whole child is paramount and, I believe, a focus point for teacher accountability. Great teaching goes beyond sharing information in a classroom and should include specific student success stories. If, as teachers, we can site real-world examples of how we impacted or changed the life of our students, as measured by academic, social, or emotional improvement, I feel that would be a successful teacher. If we can document an improved passion, commitment to learning, or dedication to a new skill or talent, then I believe that would be a successful teacher. If we could demonstrate that our students actually became better prepared to live in a global society, or better prepared to meet life challenges or advance academically, then I believe teacher accountability has been ascertained. Through careful and deliberate collaboration with others, from the teacher next door, to an ISAF Staff Sergeant in Afghanistan, I believe modeling the benefits of building cooperative relationships improves the teaching profession.

With careful and investigative study, teacher accountability can be measured using individual student growth and personal success stories as measurement criteria, above and beyond classroom scores, standardized testing data and portfolio assessments.

VIII. STATE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

If given the opportunity to speak on behalf of Texas educators, regarding teaching the whole child, I'd say, "*Not until a child has a relationship with a teacher, can he have a relationship with the learning.*"

In discussing the challenge of state funding cuts and increasing classroom sizes, I'd say,

"Stephen F. Austin knew that the people of Texas needed to be a strong determined breed. It is that pride in our state and our heritage, as Texans, which will help us combat this struggle in the same way we faced battles in the past. We will not back down, but will face the burdens together and find an opportunity to make a Texas education the nation's best education."

On preparing students to live in a global society, I would want to share that I believe a global awareness and appreciation for diversity are of utmost importance. Students now, more than ever, need to learn about the people of our world. Students need to learn about people outside of our Texas towns and villages. The students we are teaching now will be global leaders in just a few short years. Our planet is getting smaller and smaller; our global connections quicker and quicker. We need to teach our school children to appreciate our differences and value our similarities.

"*It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.*" — Maya Angelou

But being a spokesperson isn't just about a handful of clichés and quotes. It's about action. It's about doing and living and being what you want others to be, and about fostering relationships that enhance real-world learning. It's about sharing a passion, because real genuine passion leads to passion, and about enthusiasm, because enthusiasm and excitement are contagious. With an empowered, passionate, excited granny, nearly anything is possible!

I would encourage fellow educators of this great state to rally to support those who are working every day to address the tough questions: budgets and funding, testing and accountability, curriculum challenges and, of course, student and staff safety. Texans aren't known to back down from a fight even when the numbers are stacked against us.

As Texas State Teacher of the Year, I would be poised to help mobilize educators toward a common goal of working collaboratively and building relationships. Together we are more than the sum of our parts. In the words of a 2nd grade Writer for Fighter, who believes in the importance of fighting for what is right,

"memorial day is the best holiday ever because we celbrate those who faught for us and thats why we need to be brave just like those who gave us freedom and our lives and that is why this holiday is very inportnt to me caulse without them we wouldn't have freedom in our lives –that's why we writters for fighters write cards to the soldiers who fight for us – that's why we need to apresheat it"

Let's not let her down, Texas.