

MTLD Information:

Your Name: Elizabeth Erickson
Your Region: New Mexico
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Nominee Information:

Nominee Name: Emily Johns- O'Leary
Nominee Region: New Mexico
Grade / Subject: 5th grade
School Name: Dowa Yalanne

Please be as specific as possible...

1. **ULTIMATE STUDENT OUTCOMES.** To what extent will students emerge from this classroom on a path of expanded opportunities due to major academic and personal growth? What gives you this confidence? Please help us understand any data you share.

Emily Johns-O'leary's 5th grade students will leave Dowa Yalanne Elementary school this year with the academic skills and the critical consciousness they need to examine the world around them, know their unique Zuni identity and have access to opportunities of their choice.

To understand student outcomes in this classroom, one must understand the Zuni context. Situated 150 miles west of Albuquerque, the proud Zuni Pueblo seems to appear out of thin air, with majestic mountains in the backdrop often peaked with snow. Zuni is a small community and DY elementary sits in the middle of the middle village, the heart of Zuni Pueblo. While school leaders work hard to validate students' Zuni identities, the kids still face the challenge of holding to their traditions while accessing a 'modern' world. Classroom textbooks still espouse the accomplishments of Christopher Columbus; it is easy to see how students face unique challenges of knowing who they are in the midst of what outsiders have tried to rob them of- language, identity and history itself.

Emily's classroom is an incubator of critical consciousness. Students are able to talk fluently about their Zuni identity and challenge Western depictions of their culture. As one of her students, Eugene, so eloquently puts it, "People NEED to know!" They are able examine the world around them and how they fit into it, not just determining the point-of-view of the author, but what each text means for them as readers. This critical consciousness is paired with high academic expectations and achievement. According to NWEA winter scores, students halfway through the year have already made over a year of reading growth. Students are developing the skills to think conceptually in math and have a greater number sense in math than ever before

2. **STUDENT ACTIONS.** When observing and speaking with students in this corps members' class, what evidence have you seen of:
 - a. Engagement with rigorous content. To what extent are students engaging deeply with content and skills needed for success in this course & beyond?
 - b. Culture of Achievement. To what extent are students "on a mission" toward a destination that matters to them?

Engagement with Rigorous Content: Evaluation/ Synthesis (If not all students at this level, 100% of students are attempting.) In this classroom, students are consistently challenging history that has been written about them. They are reclaiming their stories, refining their point of views about the 'outside' world that has come to Zuni and are *agitated* with the realities of this unfair portrayal. They frequently question why and draw conclusions about what it would be to be a proud Zuni citizen. This high rigor extends into math and science as well, where students are constantly challenged to synthesize knowledge in order to explain how and why math works.

Culture of Achievement: Passionate, Urgent, Joyful, Caring: The students in this classroom are most certainly joyful and caring. When reading through the colonization of North America, all her students are driven to understand this history because it is **their** history, which often leads kids to feel urgent – even agitated – about the information they're learning and what they can do about it. When they realized their textbook didn't contain the "real" story of Columbus, they wrote letters to encourage the publisher to revise their books. This urgency isn't without care. Students know each others' reading levels, and encourage their classmates on assessments. Kids talk with adults and each other about ways they can make their world a better place, including their responsibilities as Zuni citizens. Everything they do bleeds with purpose and joy.

3. **TEACHER ACTIONS.** Which principles of Teaching -As Leadership are best reflected in this corps member's practice (e.g., setting big goals, investing students and influencers, planning purposefully, executing effectively, and continually increasing effectiveness, working relentlessly)? Please share evidence/examples.

Emily embodies the spirit of TAL most clearly with her vision for students and in working relentlessly.

VISION/ Sets Big Goals: Emily's goals for students are deeply rooted in her personal passion, her understanding of Zuni context and how she, as an outsider, has conceived of her identity in that context. Emily's vision is at once deeply personal and completely committed to knowing what it will take for her students to achieve their dreams for themselves and their tribe. For me, her vision is precisely what we mean when we say transformative and internalized. She's carefully considered what it will take to be academically and personally successful and why those kinds of success matter to her kids and their families. Academically, her goals were informed by previous NWEA scores and diagnostic results. Emily has a clear sense of where they need to be by the end of the year: independently reading texts at the 5th grade level (informed by common core), 80% mastery on EOY math assessments and a love of literacy. Personally, Emily has operated in clear alignment with her vision, developing deep, meaningful relationships with kids that allow them to change each other. The long-term trait and mindset development that Emily has made the cornerstone of her classroom didn't just spring fully-formed from her own mind; it has grown organically from Emily's trust in her students and understanding of her community and her identity within that community's context. Not only will Emily develop respect and humility in her students; she'll be a model of those qualities for them. She doesn't just ask kids to think critically; she holds herself to a high critical bar, always examining her own motivation and potential bias.

Working relentlessly: It seems to me that Emily is great because she has decided that she will be great. Her students will succeed no matter what, and she will take down any barrier that stands in the way of her students' goals. She intentionally widens her scope of influence. At the beginning of the year, made a visit to her students' homes. Without some addresses or a clear map of the pueblo, she enlisted the help of Tina, a Zuni language teacher who grew up in the community. As she and Tina visited her student's homes and families, she was able to ask questions about the culture and language of the Zuni people that she had never felt comfortable asking before. She has also befriended Louise, a fellow fifth grade teacher and grandmother to one of Emily's students, who has helped inform her perspective about what the Zuni community wants for the future of the pueblo. Emily prioritizes relationships to cultivate her own beliefs about what role education should play in Zuni. In addition, she works tirelessly to improve: tracking and reflecting on classroom data, attending every professional development opportunity available, always asking for an implementing feedback from colleagues and mentors.

4. TEACHER MINDSETS. How would you characterize this teacher's outlook on his or her work? What attributes, perspectives or qualities contribute to his or her success as a teacher?

Emily has made developing her own cultural competence a priority this year. She acknowledges that she came into this community as an outsider and is conscious of her own race, who she is and what she has to seek to understand before coming to conclusions. It seems that she has come into a quiet confidence about her role here. Acknowledging that she used to be anxious about other's opinions about being here, she has come to believe that Zuni is building a nation and she is an ally in building that nation. Emily has said that the quickest way to build this nation is through education, and everything she does is in the pursuit of this goal. Despite already being one of our strongest teachers, Emily opted in to a series of sessions on Culturally Responsive Teaching. Leading by example, she has fearlessly pushed that group to examine their own identities, what they believe in, and why. She knows that she is negotiating a variety of complex roles (as a woman, as a White person, as a leader and a teacher), and Emily has taken a lot of time to reflect on how this influences who she is and what she does in her classroom.

5. BROADER LEADERSHIP

- a. Which of our core values does this corps member best exemplify?

Emily embodies Respect and Humility to the utmost. Always seeking to understand the experiences of her students and community, she constantly asks how her actions will be perceived in the Zuni pueblo. She consistently partners with people in her community to understand more and get a more holistic picture of what her students want and need. In the midst of challenging circumstances with her administration, she maintained favor with her principal and gained the trust of her majority Zuni staff. Emily is also always ready

- b. Has this teacher exhibited leadership beyond the classroom within his/her school, corps and/or extended community?

Emily is the only second-year corps member leading a learning team this year, and her learning team consistently posts this highest levels of satisfaction and attendance. That is in large part due to Emily's abilities to be a cultural leader. Just as she does in her school, Emily sets an asset-based tone for our corps, always sharing her strengths freely and seeking to learn from anyone who will teach her. I believe this cultural leadership seeps into her relationship with the Zuni community as well. Emily's been invited to Shalako, the Zuni winter celebration, and has gone with her students' families to participate in other Zuni traditions.

- c. What in particular do you think future corps members could learn from this teacher?

Teachers can and must learn about teaching through critical consciousness from Emily. Many corps members understand structural racism and institutional oppression. Many corps members feel an urgent need to do something about it. Emily has managed to successfully integrate this critical consciousness into her teaching, and she's done it without many good examples from Teach For America. We taught Emily to teach mostly through direct instruction; in order to develop as a Culturally Responsive Teacher, Emily has had to re-orient her teaching style to include constructivism. Not only has she done this successfully in her own classroom, she's served as a model for other corps members in our region.

6. TEACHER GROWTH. In what ways has this teacher most grown? What has most accounted for this growth?

I think Emily has most grown in her self-confidence, through a deep understanding of her identity. She's always been a great planner, and she's always operated with a ton of respect and humility. We began to see the most change in Emily's classroom in her second semester in the classroom, as she left behind fear in favor of

cultural competence. That's when Emily grew to truly live out her belief that she was the leader of her classroom. She has continued to develop exponentially in this area.