



# **First-Grade Edwardsville CUSD#7 Teacher Receives Esteemed Award**

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EDWARDSVILLE - Mrs. Kimberlee Jones, a District 7 first grade teacher, embodies all of the traits expected from a recipient of the Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award.

Kim is an accomplished professional whose teaching abilities and capacity to build strong relationships with her students brings her to the front of an illustrious group for this nomination.

Mrs. Jones works collaboratively with beginning and veteran teachers as she provides staff development opportunities at the building and district level. She serves on several curricular committees to ensure our district's continued growth. Her positive influence impacts staff district-wide.

Mrs. Jones also takes great care in the development of her student's social-emotional well-being, which travels far beyond the classroom. Before starting each school year, she meets with her previous class to reconnect and have a play date. She takes the time to hear about their summer and answer questions about the next grade level, investing time into her former students to ensure that they are prepared to start the next grade.

Her belief in building a strong classroom community is always at the forefront of her decisions. She truly cares for the whole child and painstakingly moves beyond the academics. Kim understands that each student needs to feel safe and loved in order to learn. She takes the time to listen to each student and find out what each individual needs to be successful in the classroom.

Mrs. Jones' professionalism, character, and dedication are above reproach. She sets an exemplary illustration for us all. She will certainly deny this recognition and give someone else credit, but she is truly deserving of this nomination! It is an honor to recommend Mrs. Kimberlee Jones for the Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award.

*In a recent interview with Kimberlee, we were able to capture the essence of who this talented educator really is. It is extremely apparent as to why she was nominated as a recipient of the Emerson Excellence in Education award.*

- What is your teaching experience?
  - This is my 27th year of teaching. I don't feel as old as that sounds! During those years I have enjoyed working with students and colleagues at various grade levels and in different areas of the country. I taught kindergarten for three years in Missouri, first grade for seven years in Alabama, and this is my seventeenth year teaching first grade at N.O. Nelson Elementary School in Edwardsville. It has been a privilege to have had the opportunity to learn and grow alongside some outstanding educators and administrators in Edwardsville School District. Each year is a new challenge with a new group of students and each year it is my job as an educator to figure out how to best reach and educate each and every one of my students.
- What inspired you to become a teacher?

- As long as I can remember, I have loved school and learning. I grew up in a home where school was important and the value of an education was appreciated. I was also very fortunate to have had numerous teachers along the way who made school interesting and helped foster my love of learning. Thinking back, I loved pretty much everything about school . . . meeting my new teachers each year, seeing my friends each day, sitting on the carpet listening to my teachers read stories aloud to the class, digging into science experiments, taking in the smell and feel of a new box of crayons, performing in school programs, reading a book that really made me think, participating in sports, feeling proud when I had accomplished something that took hard work. I loved school!

As an elementary student, I couldn't seem to get enough of school. My sister and I spent countless summer days playing school; taking turns being the teacher. We recruited as many neighborhood friends as we could find in order to fill "our classroom." We even spent our allowances on school supplies which included chalk for our chalkboards and carbon copy paper so that we could create copies of our own worksheets. (Yes, my sister ended up being a teacher, too!)

When it came time to decide what I wanted to do, being a teacher just felt right. The thought of working with young people and positively impacting their lives in the same way that my teachers had impacted mine was something that I knew I wanted to do. Twenty-seven years later, I'm happy I made the decision to be a teacher. After all, I still get to go to school every day! I meet a new group of students each year, challenge myself by finding new and innovative ideas and ways to reach my students, read stories and make characters come to life , dig into science units (even blow things up occasionally), and feel proud when my students accomplish their goals!

- What do you wish you could change about public education?
  - Other than the current situation with the pandemic... An elementary classroom is a highly dynamic environment so of course there are many challenges and frustrations that arise. However, I try to teach my students that challenges and frustrations are opportunities to learn and grow. I do my best to apply the same principle to my own challenges and frustrations. Probably the biggest challenge I seem to face day in and day out is the lack of time. There never seems to be enough time to accomplish everything that I'd like to accomplish... more time for individualized instruction, small groups, cooperative learning, engaging projects, and so many more things that would benefit my students.

It's a frustration that never goes away, so I do my best to weigh the options and keep in mind the value of every minute when making the best possible decisions for my students.

- What is the best part about your job?
  - The most rewarding aspects of my job are:
    - seeing students have those "aha" moments when something suddenly makes sense
    - sharing laughs, hugs, and high-fives
    - celebrating with students when they accomplish their goals (personal or academic)
    - watching students help each other and develop a sense of empathy
    - seeing the smile of a student who is proud of a job well done
    - listening to my students discuss a book they've just read (I'm always amazed at the things they notice)
    - reading my students' writing
    - learning new things right along with my students
    - building relationships with students, families, and co-workers
    - finding new ways to reach a child that is struggling and help them be successful
- What do you hope students say about you twenty years from now?
  - I've come to realize that what I teach my students and how I teach it is important, but even more important are the relationships, enthusiasm, and attitudes that are fostered in my classroom. Any teaching strategy will be far more successful if students feel safe, valued and respected. Long after first grade, students most likely won't remember exactly what I taught them, but they will remember exactly how I made them feel. I believe all of my students deserve a teacher who believes in them and truly cares about them as people. I want my students to know that learning is exciting, but it can also be challenging. I hope to teach them to embrace those challenges with a growth mindset so that they leave my classroom knowing they can persevere. Hopefully in some way I helped to foster a lifelong love of learning and reading in my students. Most of all . . . I hope that my students will all remember being loved. If that's the case, then I've been successful.