



2016 National Teacher of the Year Finalist



JAHANA HAYES

2016 Connecticut State Teacher
of the Year

John F. Kennedy High School
Waterbury, CT

Subject: History

Grade: 9-12

School Profile: Urban

District Size: 18,750

School Size: 1,303

Years in Teaching: 12

Years in Position: 10

II. Educational History and Professional Development Activities - (two double-spaced pages)

A. Beginning with most recent, list colleges and universities attended including postgraduate studies. Indicate degrees earned and dates of attendance.

- 2012-2014 University of Bridgeport | Bridgeport, CT; Advanced Studies, Sixth Year Educational Leadership Certification
- 2010-2012 Saint Joseph University | West Hartford, CT; Curriculum and Instruction, Master of Arts/ Education Degree
- 2002-2005 Southern Connecticut State University | New Haven, CT; History and Social Science, Bachelor of Science/ History Degree
- 2000- 2002 Naugatuck Valley Community College | Waterbury, CT; General Studies, Associate in Science/ Liberal Arts Degree

B. Beginning with most recent, list teaching employment history indicating time period, grade level and subject area.

- 01/ 2006 – Present Waterbury Public Schools/ John F. Kennedy High School/ Social Studies Teacher 9th grade World History honors SOAR; 10th grade Roots of American Citizenship and United States History; 11th grade Comparative Government; 11th grade Geography; 12th grade African American History (wrote curriculum for class)
- 09/2004-01/2006 New Haven Public Schools/ James Hillhouse High School/ Social Studies Teacher/ 10th grade Civics and United States History

C. Beginning with most recent, list professional association memberships including information regarding offices held and other relevant activities.

- 2005-present Waterbury Teachers Association
- 2003-present Connecticut Education Association Member
- 2003-present National Education Association
- 2003-present Golden Key International Honor Society (Southern CT State University)
- 2003-present Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society (Naugatuck Valley Community College)

Relevant Experience

- 2009-Current Chairperson John F. Kennedy School of Academic Renown (SOAR) Review Board
A “school-within-a school” concept for highly gifted students
Handle all discipline, community service, policy revision, administrative functions and admission/selection related to students involved in the “school within a school” program at Kennedy High School
- 2007- 2014 21st Century After School Program Lead Teacher
Planned and implemented leadership activities for an after school program. Collected data and submitted all necessary paperwork to the State Department of Education in a timely fashion. Teen Idol after school theatre program coordinator

- 2010/ 2014 NEASC Committee Chairperson/ Visiting Committee Member
Facilitated the Community Resources for Learning Committee and wrote and edited the final NEASC accreditation report. Served as a member of a visiting committee (2014)
- 2012-Current Chairperson Kennedy School Governance Council
Work collaboratively with staff, students, parents and community members to improve student achievement
- 2014- 2015 Taft Global Leadership Institute
Served as a member of the selection committee and mentor for students from Taft Private Boarding School and Waterbury Public Schools
- 2015 Edgenuity Summer School Coordinator
Coordinate online summer credit retrieval program

D. Beginning with most recent, list staff development leadership activity and leadership activity in the training of future teachers.

- 2003-2007 Connecticut Urban Consortium
Collaborated with teachers in three CT urban centers to facilitate professional leadership and collegiality, and form partnerships with a wide variety of history-rich organizations that serve the New Haven, New London and Waterbury regions of the Connecticut.
- 2015 Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention Planning Grant
Co-authored and secured a state grant for the purpose of implementing a multi-pronged, multi-year plan for increasing Black and Latino representation in the Waterbury Public School District.

The Yancy Forum
Leadership development forum cohort 2015

Teacher Education and Mentoring Program (TEAM)
Certified mentor for beginning teachers

E. Beginning with the most recent, list awards and other recognition of your teaching.

- 2016 Connecticut Teacher of the Year
- 2015 John F. Kennedy/ Waterbury Public Schools Teacher of the Year
- 2015 Educator of the Year / Waterbury Neighborhood Council
- 2015 Official Citation/ CT Legislative Representatives of the 72nd District
- 2015 Kennedy High School Dancing with the Stars Champion
Student /teacher couples dance competition judged by faculty and students
- 2015 Waterbury Black Democratic Club Mayor for a Day Committee
Recognized for involvement and commitment to the Waterbury Community
- 2013/2014/2015 PBIS Staff Member of the Month

III. Professional Biography - (two double-spaced pages)

A. What were the factors that influenced you to become a teacher? Describe what you consider to be your greatest contributions and accomplishments in education.

My personal experiences are the greatest contributing factors to my becoming a teacher. These experiences shaped my views and continue to influence my teaching style. Being the first in my family to attend college helps me to fully appreciate the importance of education. As a child everything I learned about school I learned at school. Teachers provided me with the support and encouragement to be a good student. My family provided for me; however education was not seen as a pathway to success. None of their experiences included higher education so they stressed the importance of hard work and industry. They told me to get a job with decent pay and benefits and work hard to support myself. This message was contradicted by the constant cycle of drugs, welfare and abuse that persisted in my family. Teachers exposed me to a different world by letting me borrow books to read at home and sharing stories about their college experiences. They challenged me to dream bigger and imagine myself in a different set of circumstances. I was oblivious to opportunities that existed outside of the projects where I grew up, but my teachers vicariously ignited a passion in me. I was surrounded by abject poverty, drugs and violence, yet my teachers made me believe that I was college material. I became a teenage mother in high school and almost gave up on my dreams completely. However, my teachers showed me the many options that were still available if I continued my education. These positive experiences at school inspired me to become a teacher and that has always been my driving influence.

As a teacher, my own life is a constant reminder that students come from different circumstances and experiences. I have learned that teaching is a lifestyle that extends well beyond the contracted hours. I strive to meet students where they are, and not dwell on where they should be. I remember myself at various points in my journey and wonder how hopeless I must have seemed to the teachers who continued to work with me. They saw potential in me and did not give up even when it seemed like I would not graduate. Because of this, I celebrate every milestone, no matter how big or small and support students through the learning process because I know that this is not the end of their journey.

Working in an urban public school district with a widely diverse population, I see so many things that fall outside of traditional teaching responsibilities. It is those times when I am transformed into an advisor, counselor, confidant and protector. I also recognize that not all of my students have the same desire as I did to go to college. I remind them that this too is ok.

Students have to learn to be their best selves and pursue their own dreams even if higher education is not their best option. Many students are amazed that I don't constantly push them into a college setting. I let them know that it is wholly acceptable to be an entrepreneur or a carpenter, hairdresser, plumber or whatever they desire. I have made the commitment to help my students in the same way my teachers helped me and that can come in various forms. It is my understanding of diversity that helps me develop lasting relationships with my students and inspire them to achieve. One of the most critical issues affecting both education and society is the lack of empathy and understanding of others. If we show students that they are important, begin to engage them in dialogue, help them develop an appreciation for diversity and recognize that all people matter while they are still in school; many of the challenges we face in society will be improved.

While I have a passion for educating students, I am most proud of the influence I have beyond the classroom and I see this as my greatest contribution. Students are constantly coming to me for advice and direction. In my job I have been able to engage students in a variety of multi-faceted service projects. I never expected community service to be such a pronounced part of my work but the satisfaction that comes from watching students take ownership of their community is unmatched. I believe that it doesn't matter how bright a student is or where they rank in a class or what colleges they have been accepted to if they do nothing with their gift to improve the human condition. I try to teach students that we are all obligated to help others and improve society. Oftentimes people in the community ask me how I get so many young people to volunteer for community service and my answer is always the same, "I ask." Students want to do well, and they want to help others but need to see those behaviors modeled a few times. Initially, I am encouraging students to get involved but as time goes by they are seeking out their own opportunities and encouraging their friends to join. It starts with me but like a wildfire the desire to help others spreads. Last year I was amazed when I went to register my students for the Relay for Life team and saw that fourteen other teams were led by former students who continued to support the fundraiser to end cancer. By serving their community students are able to demonstrate personal growth and model adult behaviors. This has become extremely personal to me because I feel that graduating students who demonstrate respect, responsibility, honesty and integrity is as critically important as mastering content and demonstrating proficiency.

IV. Community Involvement - (one double-spaced page)

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

Dr. Martin Luther King said the purpose of education is twofold, to build knowledge and character. This resonated with me and I have dedicated myself to teaching students the importance of helping in their community and improving the human condition. In my first few years of teaching, I concentrated solely on the content and tried to memorize everything I was taught in school. One year, I had a group of students who seemed unusually distracted and unmotivated. I could not figure out why, but after a series of conversations I realized that seven students in this one class had lost a parent to cancer and their families were still dealing with the effects. We decided, as a group, to get involved with the American Cancer Society. These students became more active and engaged in class and I realized that there was a direct relationship to the work we were doing in the community. Author Dianne Hedin writes in her book, *The Power of Community Service*, "community service [learning] provides the critical missing link for many students, and an opportunity to apply academic learning to real human needs and to make the knowledge gained usable in their thinking beyond the situation in which the learning occurred." I saw them wanting to be better people, not just better students. Over time I realized that I needed to connect to my students on a personal level and think of them as members of society in order help them reach their full potential in my class.

To do this, I lead by example as the co-advisor of *Helping Out People Everywhere* (HOPE) Club. My students and I participate annually in the Walk for Autism and Relay for Life, and have raised thousands of dollars towards cancer research. We hold an annual Cancer Awareness Walk with students and faculty and a coat and food drive during the holiday season. HOPE has also traveled around the country to work with Habitat for Humanity. My students see that no matter how bleak their circumstances seem, there is always an opportunity to help others and they gain a sense of pride from their service work. Students are also more receptive to this idea because they are aware of my humble beginnings and see me working to improve the quality of our community and help others.

In the community I am actively involved in the Walnut Orange Walsh neighborhood (W.O.W) Community Learning Center as an after school programs director and youth advisor. I lead a Social Concerns Committee and am responsible for voter registration information workshops and monthly feeding the homeless and clothing drives. I am a part of the City Wide Front Porch Clean Up Initiative. As a member I helped establish the group as a nonprofit community service agency and spearhead many city wide neighborhood cleanups and beautification projects.

After being selected the Connecticut Teacher of the year I realized that this was a message that needed to be shared with others. My district does not have a service learning requirement so much of the work that I have done is isolated and available mostly to students in my school. I am developing a service

learning curriculum in which students can explore the symbiotic relationships and satisfaction that comes from helping others. This class would teach the benefits of, and various ways students can help out in their communities. It would conclude with a Capstone Project in which students identify, plan and implement local service projects.

V. Philosophy of Teaching - (two double-spaced pages)

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

B. How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in your personal teaching style?

My educational philosophy centers on the belief that all students can learn and have the right to a high quality education that is specific to their needs and provides a unique purposeful experience. I grew up in a poor neighborhood where children were not expected to be high achievers and I experienced firsthand the results of those low expectations. Too many of my friends did not share the same positive experiences in school that I did. At an early age I realized that regardless of social inequities, students must be provided with the tools to achieve academic proficiency. Furthermore, students need to hear a clear position of tolerance from their teachers at all times. I can still remember the teachers who refused to accept the stereotypical views of inner city children and for them I am grateful. As a result, I entered this profession with a passion for the work that I do and an understanding that my work would extend beyond the classroom and into the world. I have a full understanding that many students come to school struggling to solve adult problems and teachers have to work through that before they can even begin to teach. In 1994, Gloria Ladson-Billings created the term “culturally relevant teaching” to describe “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. I remember best the teachers who were doing this long before 1994; they used my circumstances as tools for learning and opportunities for growth as opposed to negative reminders of the obstacles that monopolized my daily life. As a teacher, I strive to facilitate learning in a way that engages students by connecting on a personal level and stimulating academic growth while simultaneously producing contentious and productive members of society. All teachers must be knowledgeable of the population they serve, through personal experiences or research and conversations, and find ways to empower students.

It is my belief that the most outstanding teachers inspire and motivate students to want to learn. A teacher can master the content and even develop dynamic lessons; however, if the students are not receptive or motivated no true learning can take place. Too often in education we encounter students who take a passive role in their learning by mastering memorization skills in order to get good grades. Other times students come to school day after day and grow increasingly frustrated because they feel they will never do well. Educators cannot rely on the belief that parents and families are the main source of encouragement and motivation for students. As a teacher, I try to always be enthusiastic and express a sincere interest in my students' academic success. I aim to inspire students to be more interested in the process than the product. I am constantly trying to challenge students to take a constructivist approach, ask questions, and in turn, apply their learning in different ways. My goal is for students to become self-directed, intrinsically motivated learners who are less concerned with grades and more concerned with gaining deeper knowledge and understanding. The students begin to realize that if they are performing at their personal best, that is enough, and they begin to learn for the sake of learning. The students realize that I am a partner in their academic journey. I also rely on the relationships I develop with my colleagues. They are a constant source of encouragement and information for me. I see myself as an adult learner and respect the fact that there are various ways of "being and doing" and welcome the perspectives of others to help inform my decision making.

Promoting academic success in the classroom and developing a mutual respect among students are inextricably connected. As a teacher I pride myself on being both fair and democratic while fostering an environment where students feel nurtured and capable of success. I gain the respect of my students and this diminishes negative behaviors and hindrances to the learning process. By modeling ethical behavior I inadvertently teach students how to address daily challenges in a more appropriate way. It has always been my highest priority to make my classroom a safe place where there is open communication, trust, fair treatment, and students are supported in all of their efforts. My educational philosophy is demonstrated in my teaching style every day. I make it a priority to make personal connections and establish trust among my students. I use humor to engage them and always add a personal touch to my lessons. As a history teacher I am sure to include culturally relevant lessons and include examples that relate to all of my students.

My own experiences have forced me to be purposeful about my teaching and have shaped my attitudes. These experiences are also the reasons I strive to be sensitive about my students' various cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Educators must include all students in the

conversation and seek out materials and resources that expose students to a wide variety of cultures. Students must be engaged in the learning and feel that they are included and represented in all conversations surrounding their education. Teachers must take the time to have conversations and explore resources that allow them to invite families and communities to participate in their child's learning. Cultural diversity is one of the greatest assets in a classroom setting. Students must learn to embrace differences in these settings if they are expected to exhibit behaviors that represent acceptance in the real world.

VI. Education Issues and Trends - (two double-spaced pages)

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

There are many critical issues that impact education and the future of our nation's schools. Making sure that all students reach proficiency and have a meaningful educational experience, using data to drive decision making, creating safe schools and providing resources are all critically important dilemmas to consider in education. While the focus should always remain on students; recruiting, supporting and retaining culturally competent and diverse educators cannot be overlooked. Teachers, administrators and school faculty play a key role in student success. This may not be the most pressing issue in education but it is real and important to me.

As a child growing up in an urban poverty stricken environment, I only came in contact with one minority teacher. This contact greatly influenced the person I became. Most of my teachers lived outside the district and had experiences that were very different from mine. Many of my teachers were second or third generation educators and had always known they would be teachers. I saw little of myself in any of them. I do not say this to imply that only minority educators would have a clearer understanding of my life, or that a minority teacher would have similar experiences; but to say that as a child I would have loved to see a teacher who looked like me and shared my cultural background. In a recently published study in *Economics of Education Review*, it was shown that Black, white and Asian students benefit from being assigned to a teacher that looks like them. Their test scores go up in years when their teacher shares their ethnicity, compared to years when their teacher has a different ethnicity. It is very difficult to explain the feelings of isolation that come when you are in a school and the faculty is not reflective of your culture or heritage. As population demographics continue to shift, school districts must be intentional in their efforts to create a more diverse workforce.

These feelings stayed with me and I have been determined to work in my district to help implement strategies focused on addressing this issue. I played a key role in securing a \$25,000

planning grant that provided funds to develop a plan with the goal of increasing awareness and interest in education as a career among all students and creating a future pipeline of teachers and potential candidates. The plan also sought to improve minority recruitment and retention practices as a key component of the work that would be done. The plan was seen as promising and the State Department of Education provided an additional \$50,000 for implementation. The local Board of Education and community partners have committed their assistance to facilitate these efforts. The plan seeks to expand student exposure to education as a profession by developing courses, clubs and community partnerships which will create the series of supports necessary for students to pursue education as a career. Additionally, discussions have been initiated which are intended to result in augmentation of current dual credit offerings with local colleges and universities.

This work will elevate the teaching profession and show students the value in choosing this career. I am extremely proud of this action plan which seeks to improve recruitment and retention of minority educators by developing programs and professional development opportunities which support a more culturally diverse workforce. The desire to enter the teaching profession is closely linked to the experiences that students have in the education system. Teachers must find ways to improve the classroom experience of minority students and encourage them to consider education as a profession by giving them role models they can take pride in. There is a connection that exists between minority students and educators that cannot be duplicated. Students need role models who are reflective of themselves and schools must do more to ensure this happens. White students also need to see minorities in classrooms serving as positive role models. They too can benefit from and reflect back on these interactions as a way to dispel stereotypes and proceed in the direction of progress and tolerance. Programs like this can be translated or duplicated in any setting, for example suburban or rural schools can help students identify with teachers as a way to find solutions to societal problems as well. The aim is to infuse the teaching pipeline with more eligible professionals and begins to fill some of the gaps in minority hiring. When students feel applauded and included they are inclined to perform better in school

VII. The Teaching Profession - (two double-spaced pages)

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

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

In order to strengthen and improve the teaching profession I am always mindful about being a positive role model and trying to exemplify everything that is good about teaching. I have learned from experience that students can sense a teacher who is passionate about their education. Being constantly faced with negative media perceptions surrounding teaching practices and a perceived lack of accountability, makes me that much more determined to be vocal and supportive of teachers and teaching as a profession. I take my job and responsibilities very seriously and I am always working to improve myself and build capacity in others. I volunteer to be involved in school improvement initiatives and work in many leadership capacities to improve my school and community. I stay abreast of current research and trends in education, attend workshops and embrace any learning opportunities that are available to me and in turn I share what I have learned with my colleagues. I stay connected to a network of critical friends which includes former professors, colleagues, principals, students, and parents who are eager to share their knowledge and work to improve the teaching profession. I share this knowledge in simple terms with my students and parents because I remember my grandmother, with a very limited education, attempting to navigate a system that was foreign to her when I was a child. Collaboration is critical to strengthening and improving the teaching profession. There is more than one way to teach and solve the issues in education. A mosaic approach is best in which teachers collaborate and piece together proven strategies that have worked in their classrooms. When teachers feel supported and encouraged they are much happier in their jobs and students and the profession benefit. To be a teacher is an honor and a privilege and if this belief informs all of our decision making the profession will continually be strengthened and improved.

To strengthen the profession, I have continued to educate myself through graduate level courses and professional development. I always volunteer to be a part of new initiatives at my school so I can fully appreciate what is expected and share the information with colleagues and parents in an effort to promote deeper understanding. I value and respect adult learners and strive to be a part of the solution. Recently, I became a part of a leadership development cohort. This group of critical friends and educators, at various stages in their careers, meets monthly to discuss issues and current trends in education. Through multiple perspectives and lenses we are able to take a close look at some of the challenges and successes in education and support each other in the learning. The *American Educational Research Journal* (Vol. 41, No. 3), found that teachers who took part in support or "induction" programs were much more likely to stay in the profession than those who didn't participate in such programs. Being part of this group helps me to develop

creative and productive ways to deal with many of the challenges I face in education and I am eager to share this information with my colleagues and new teachers entering the profession.

In order to improve teaching practices there must be accountability measures in place. However, this cannot be limited to simple standardized test scores. The human element and the interaction among teachers and students are as important as mastering content and are inextricably connected to any accountability measures. Accountability measures should include observations and feedback focused on improvement. Parents, students and community members should be included in this conversation. Students are expected to be productive members of society so their interactions in the community are directly related to the education they receive. Students should be able to articulate what they have learned in innovative and creative ways such as performance tasks and portfolios. Evaluating this body of work is a much better indicator of the effectiveness of teachers and the learning that has occurred in the classroom. All stakeholders (teachers, administrators, students, parents, community members etc.) must come to consensus and be open to non-traditional ways of measuring teacher accountability and evaluating student progress in a way that does not limit the measure of improvement to test scores.

Every day I see students who are increasingly frustrated because they are excellent students who are productive and active in the school community, yet this may not translate in their standardized test scores so colleges are reluctant to accept them. Accountability for students and teachers needs to be measured in multiple ways. Data is concrete and an easy indicator of improvement but more non-traditional methods need to be explored. The push for accountability measures forces teachers to focus on teaching to tests and often overlooks the various contributions students and teachers are making in society. Education is a field that involves people so human variables must be considered. Students come with various needs and therefore differentiation must occur in the teaching, learning and accessing of students and teachers.

VIII. National Teacher of the Year - (one double-spaced page)

A. As the 2016 National Teacher of the Year, you would serve as a spokesperson and representative for the entire teaching profession. What would be your

message? What would you communicate to your profession and to the general public?

As a spokesperson for the profession, I would seize the opportunity to communicate the benefits of teaching as a career in the hopes of encouraging more people to become educators. We must celebrate teaching and encourage students to pursue post-secondary education with a focus on teaching as a career. Educators need to make a concentrated effort to increase exposure and awareness to teaching among young people. As educators retire, it is discouraging to see the number of students entering the profession dwindle and programs eliminated. Teachers must illuminate the teaching profession for students, highlighting the benefits, the job security and the impact on the lives of others while serving as a positive role model. Students need to understand that they possess many valuable gifts that could be shared if they were to become educators.

I would challenge others to embark on a campaign to inspire and encourage students to enter the profession. We must show pride in our profession, highlight and celebrate our decision to become teachers every time we have the opportunity. We must conduct ourselves as professionals and remind students that it is a privilege to be charged with educating our youth. In a time when media attention and accountability measures make teaching less attractive, we must foster a culture shift and show students that a teaching career is highly respected and something of which to be proud. Having been selected as the Teacher of the Year in my district has reminded me of what an honor it is to teach. The entire community has taken ownership of education and a dialogue has begun.

Additionally, students should learn from their teachers' example about the importance of helping others and serving in the community. Teachers should focus some attention on encouraging students to become involved in their communities. If these habits are formed in school, students will carry them into the world. It is of no benefit to anyone if a student achieves high grades and tremendous academic success if they have no desire or knowledge of how to help others. Solving these challenges has to move beyond the discussion stage and concrete efforts need to be implemented to alter the trajectory and bring about real, substantive change.

IX. Letters of Support - (limit of three letters, each a MAXIMUM of ONE PAGE)

Include **three** letters of support from any of the following: superintendent, principal, administrator, colleague, student/former student, parent, or civic leader.

Dr. Kathleen Ouellette

Superintendent Waterbury Public Schools

Mr. Robert Johnston

Principal John F. Kennedy High School

Mr. Vincent Schaff

Parent

October 24, 2015

Dear Selection Committee:

In acknowledging the characteristics which define the essence of a candidate worthy of recognition as the National Teacher of the Year, one is quickly drawn not only to pedagogical perfection (if there can ever be such a concept), but also to the ability to connect to the hearts and minds of a school community. By cultivating these characteristics, Jahana has been able to clearly promote and refine a focused, pragmatic, yet heartfelt approach of an evolving global vision of education. To that end, all the aspiring candidates likely exhibit, at least in part, these characteristics; however, my perspective is grounded in knowing and seeing Mrs. Jahana Hayes change lives firsthand – for that, I am confident that she not only represents the community of Waterbury, CT with distinction, but also the teaching profession with honor.

One can only assume that, in your search for National Teacher of the Year, you are seeking “more” – someone who represents the defining essence of inspiration. I can humbly relate to you that the life and the body of work of Jahana Hayes is the epitome of the American dream. Jahana Hayes grew up as a minority child in an economically depressed area of Waterbury, CT. She remembers experiencing the harsh realities of urban life as a child, but she chose to focus on the idea that neighbors fed one another and looked out for one another. She learned, firsthand, when she became a student of the Waterbury Public Schools, that education was a means for expanding her world and the opportunities that exist. She credits her teachers with recognizing her talents, and she remembers their encouragement and faith in her abilities. Her graduation from an alternative education program came after becoming a mom. Seven years after that graduation, she enrolled in a community college followed by a state university, which led to a new beginning and a teaching career thereafter. Her commitment to Waterbury, both as a city and as a learning community, remains steadfast. Daily, Jahana gives back to the community which didn’t give up on her.

Many educators are adept at writing exemplar lesson plans, gathering and analyzing data and trends; however, they struggle to apply the information all the while making personal connections to students in regards to its intent. It is in this context that Jahana truly excels. When engaged in these discussions (with students and/or colleagues), she actively listens and guides others toward a deeper understanding of the problem or the next step in the plan- always what’s in the best interest of the person receiving the message. It is a “gift” to give others the feeling that someone values and realizes their worth. This defines Jahana’s influence. Hence, others want to learn from her and, in turn, are willing to take her advice and translate it to actionable solutions. Accordingly, Jahana has motivated both the hearts and minds of all those who cross her path, all the while playing a significant role in cultivating a climate of continuous improvement at the high school she calls home.

Jahana has the interpersonal competencies that support top educational success in the 21st Century and “Next Generation” educational arena. She is an innovative and independent thinker who is able to make informed decisions to guide the work of our organization and that of her students toward clearly identified improved student outcomes. She is a consummate professional who demonstrates daily that she genuinely believes that the complexity of our work demands tapping into the knowledge and experience of the collective rather than relying upon those of the one person in charge. She is a collaborative and insightful partner with the transformational process associated with the district’s Blueprint for Change, the improvement plan for continuous student achievement. Waterbury Public Schools has what no other school district in this country can tout: WE HAVE JAHANA HAYES as a member of our team. The students of Waterbury are the benefactors.

I am very pleased to recommend Mrs. Jahana Hayes for your consideration as National Teacher of the Year. Jahana is an exemplary educator who serves as a remarkable testimony to the concept that, through determination, perseverance and the willingness to give and receive wise counsel, anything is achievable. It is with a sense of deep pride that I recommend Jahana Hayes for National Teacher of the Year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathleen M. Ouellette
Superintendent of Schools

October 20, 2015

National Teacher of the Year selection Committee:

I am writing in support of Jahana Hayes' nomination as this year's National Teacher of the Year. I have had the pleasure of knowing Jahana for the past thirteen years as a teaching colleague, as her content area supervisor, as her principal, and as a personal friend. It was with a great deal of pride that I nominated her, and then watched as she was selected as Teacher of the Year for Waterbury and then the state of Connecticut.

Jahana is an exceptional teacher who has consistently demonstrated the ability to reach students of widely varying backgrounds and ability levels. She is a reflective practitioner and a consummate professional who takes her responsibility to teach all of her students very seriously. She sets high expectations for her students and herself and then provides the necessary instruction and support in order for those students to meet her high standards. In fact, there is no finer example of commitment and dedication to student learning than Jahana Hayes. She exhibits the highest degree of dedication to her students' success and well-being on a daily basis. It is for these reasons that Jahana was selected by her peers as the Kennedy High School Teacher of the Year. According to a colleague who has worked with Jahana for many years, "She is a dynamo when it comes to providing students with authentic learning opportunities." In addition, Jahana strives to help her students become successful in their future endeavors. Not simply a teacher to her students, she is also an advisor, a mentor, and a counselor. She is someone students trust and admire both during and after their years in high school. Furthermore, her presence at nearly every after-school activity and extracurricular event is evidence of her commitment to her students and her willingness to provide the extra time and effort that means so much to the school community. Jahana's effectiveness as an instructor is directly related to her students' recognition of her sincere investment in their lives and welfare.

Jahana has also served as a leader among her peers at Kennedy and throughout the school district. She served as a committee chair during Kennedy's most recent NEASC accreditation visit, as well as serving on a number of district-wide curriculum revision committees. Additionally, she has spearheaded Kennedy's involvement in the Taft School Global Leadership Institute. Currently, Jahana facilitates Waterbury's involvement in the Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant, a district wide effort to increase the number of minority teachers serving the students of Waterbury, as well as growing an impressive pool of future Waterbury educators from the ranks of current Waterbury high school students.

However, Jahana's greatest passion may be for service learning and she has made a conscientious effort to promote civic mindedness and community service among the students at Kennedy High School. She has helped to facilitate student community service efforts through the HOPE Club and the YES Club, and Jahana can frequently be found among students, contributing to the Waterbury community, whether it be at The Gathering, Relay for Life, or the City-wide Front Porch Program. Jahana has a passion for community service, and this most certainly is passed along to each of her students.

Jahana makes it a top priority to prepare all of her students to lead productive and successful lives. This is the reason she has invested such a great deal of time and energy in providing a multitude of enriching learning opportunities in each of her Social Studies classes at Kennedy High School. As a leader among the staff in the SOAR program, a school-within-a-school for academically advanced students, she has helped build it and maintain it as an exciting learning opportunity for Waterbury students and a point of pride among the Kennedy community. Through her role as the chairperson of the Kennedy School Governance Council, she has directed the efforts of teachers, parents, students, and community members in ways that have contributed to continual school improvement and improved school culture. In addition, Jahana has made herself available, both during and after school, to all of the students of Kennedy High School to help in a myriad of ways, as they grow as learners and citizens.

Jahana Hayes is an exemplary teacher who genuinely touches student lives year after year. She takes great pride in helping students find success in high school and prepare for success in their post-secondary educational endeavors. Her students are enabled to achieve their goals in high school and beyond through Jahana's example and active guidance. Her quality as an educator is only surpassed by the quality of her personal character. She is an individual of the highest integrity, and it is with the greatest confidence and without the slightest reservation that I offer my support of Jahana Hayes as National Teacher of the Year. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Johnston
Principal John F. Kennedy High School

October 22, 2015

National Teacher of the Year Selection Committee,

As the parent of a student at Kennedy High School, I've watched my son thrive his first two years at Kennedy. A major reason for this is Jahana. If you knew her you'd know Jahana is this way with all students, not just my son and not just S.O.A.R. students. Jahana is a shining example of an educator who cares about her students and has mastered her craft. In the classroom, she challenges the students and pushes them to be active participants. Her classes are interesting and engaging. My evidence is a son, coming home and wanting to talk about what has been discussed in class. Attend a school event and there is Jahana, after school, evenings, and weekends. She not only educates but mentors and nurtures students of all backgrounds. Spend time with Jahana around students and two things become evident, she truly enjoys her work and she has the complete respect of those students.

Maybe the most important point is that Jahana grew up in our city and she has stayed in Waterbury. A professional with her experience and talents could have easily left our city for more lucrative positions. I'm certain that her experiences growing up in our city are a reason she's able to connect so genuinely with the students.

I became involved with the school governance committee at Kennedy because of Jahana. When you see how much she gives of herself to the students and our high school, you feel compelled to get involved. She has a way of bringing people together. Her enthusiasm is infectious and she leads people with ease.

Her real reward is the thousands of students Jahana will have impacted that are going to go out into this world, all the better for having been taught, mentored, and challenged by her. And that has no equivalent. However it is nice to be recognized by your peer's in your chosen profession. I'd like to see her with this honor to show people around the country that Waterbury schools have educators that are just as bright and shining as our new cross on the hill.

Warm regards,

Vince Schaff
Parent