



NATIONAL TEACHER OF THE YEAR PROGRAM

MAKING A DIFFERENCE -- SHAPING THE FUTURE

Kimberly Oliver

2006 National Teacher of the Year
2006 Maryland Teacher of the Year
Broadacres Elementary School
Silver Spring, Maryland

School Profile: Suburban

Number of Students in the District: 139,203.
Number of Students in the Building: 520
Major Subject Area: Elementary
Grade Level: Kindergarten
Total Years of Teaching Experience: 6
Years in Present Position: 6

Educational History and Professional Development Activities

- A. Beginning with most recent, list colleges and universities attended including postgraduate studies. Indicate degrees earned and dates of attendance.
- B. Beginning with most recent, list teaching employment history indicating time period, grade level and subject area.
- C. Beginning with most recent, list professional association memberships including information regarding offices held and other relevant activities.
- D. Beginning with most recent, list staff development leadership activity and leadership activity in the training of future teachers.
- E. Beginning with the most recent, list awards and other recognition of your teaching.

A. Education

1. Wilmington College; Wilmington, DE, M.Ed.
(Elementary Education, 1998-2000)
2. Hampton University; Hampton, VA, B.A.
(English Arts, 1994-1998)

B. Employment

1. Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, MD. (2000–Present)
Kindergarten Teacher, Broad Acres Elementary School
2. Elementary Workshop Montessori School, Wilmington, DE (1999-2000)
Assistant Teacher, 9-12 years old multiage class

C. Professional Association Memberships

1. National Education Association
2. Maryland State Teachers Association
3. Montgomery County Education Association
4. Maryland Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board
5. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
6. Montgomery County National Board Certified Teachers Network
7. Teacher Leaders Network

D. Leadership Activities

1. Kindergarten Teacher Trainer, Montgomery County Public Schools
 - Train new and experienced Montgomery County Public Schools kindergarten teachers on the instructional curriculum and how it can be implemented, monitored, and assessed
 - Model teaching various lessons, exploring options for differentiation
 - Facilitate discussions on instructional strategies, best practices, and classroom management
 - Host peer visits for educators to observe best practices
 - Training video for the Montgomery County Public Schools Assessment Program
 - Training videos for Scott Foresman on science instructional strategies
2. Mentor Teacher, Montgomery County Public Schools
 - Mentor new kindergarten teachers during their first year of teaching
 - Mentor for University of Maryland student intern during a year-long placement
 - Mentor teachers pursuing National Board Certification
3. Learning Walk Chairperson, Broad Acres Elementary School
 - Plan and design teacher-directed and student-centered classroom visits to identify trends and commonalities across the school, determining the needs for professional development
4. Staff Development Chairperson, Broad Acres Elementary School
 - Plan bimonthly staff meetings and professional development workshops based on the needs of staff

- 5. Kindergarten Team Leader, Broad Acres Elementary School
- Coordinate a team of six teachers

E. Awards and Recognition

1. Maryland State Teacher of the Year, October 2005
2. Montgomery County Public Schools Teacher of the Year, April 2005
3. Marion Greenblatt Excellence in Teaching Award, March 2005
4. National Board Certified Teacher, Early Childhood Generalist, November 2004

Professional Biography

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

Several factors, including childhood experiences influenced my decision to become an educator. As a young child, I loved and admired my daycare teacher, Mrs. Chandler, who was such an inspiration for me that I decided I wanted to be just like her when I grew up. At such a young age, I could not express and did not understand why I wanted to emulate her; however, as an adult, I realize that Mrs. Chandler earned my love and respect for two significant reasons. The first is the relationship that she developed with me. I have vivid memories of being in Mrs. Chandler's class and interacting with her, but ironically no other children are in those memories. This is because Mrs. Chandler made me feel special as if I were the only child in her class. She did this by showing a genuine interest, love, and concern for me and for my family. The second reason I cherished Mrs. Chandler is because she gave me a gift; she shared her love for reading with me. She not only taught me how to read, she helped me develop a love for reading that I still have today. I remember feeling empowered and independent when I became a reader. Mrs. Chandler encouraged me by giving me her undivided attention, sharing in my enthusiasm, and providing an abundance of books for me to read. Because of her, I know the importance of being a life-long learner. I believe that every child needs a "Mrs. Chandler" in his or her life.

Although I did not have many teachers like Mrs. Chandler as I progressed through school, I did have a loving and stable family who supported me in all of my efforts and helped me to be successful. However, many of my friends did not. Many came from unstable homes and were highly impacted by poverty. As I grew older, I became aware of a difference in expectations and available opportunities. For instance, I was given the opportunity to take rigorous college preparatory classes. Many of my friends from disadvantaged homes were not given the same opportunity, even though they were equally capable of the work. Consequently, I watched so many of my friends live up to the low expectations that were set for them. By the time we reached high school, I had moved on to advanced placement classes. Some of my friends were still achieving at mediocre levels in basic classes, while a few of them were demoted to remedial classes. To this day, I find myself wondering what if things had been different. What if I were a disadvantaged student? What if I never had a Mrs. Chandler in my life? What if my disadvantaged friends had 12 years worth of Mrs. Chandlers in their lives? What would be the difference?

I chose to be a teacher because of the "what ifs." I want to be the "x" factor making a difference in the lives of those who need it the most. I want to have a positive impact on young children, sharing my zeal for learning and reading, just as Mrs. Chandler did for me. I want to motivate and inspire the neediest students whom many have written off and let them know that they can achieve and succeed in life regardless of what the statistics may show. I believe that teaching gives me the opportunity to do all of these things every day. I teach kindergarteners at a school where 90 percent of the students live in poverty and 75

percent of students speak a language other than English at home. I am the first teacher for the majority of my students. I have high expectations for each of them, and I teach them that they can accomplish anything with hard work and persistence. I teach these beliefs not only to my students, but to their families and to my colleagues as well. I believe that I am making a difference because of the relationships that I build and the life skills that I teach which will continue to impact the lives of my students way beyond kindergarten.

When considering all of my accomplishments, I believe my greatest contribution in education has been working as a teacher leader to build a professional learning community where collaboration is used to improve teaching and learning. When I arrived at Broad Acres Elementary School six years ago, the school was in danger of being restructured by the state because of declining academic performance. Teachers were working independently and inefficiently, and student expectations were not clear. In collaboration with the teacher's union, the school district worked on a plan to improve student achievement and avoid state action. As a teacher leader, I helped create and implement several collaborative structures to ensure consistency in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, providing adequate support for teachers and ultimately increasing student achievement. Some of these structures include bimonthly instructional planning sessions, formal sessions to examine student work, professional study groups, and learning walks. Each collaborative structure provides an opportunity for my colleagues and me to plan and reflect with grade level and/or vertical teams and evaluate our beliefs and expectations for students. They also allow us to share our expertise with one another so that students benefit from the strengths of the group and are less likely to be affected by individual weaknesses.

By building a professional learning community and emphasizing collaboration, I have impacted the learning of more than 500 students. The impact is evident in the individual student success stories of each child at Broad Acres Elementary School. It also is evident in the success of the school as a whole. Although no assessments can truly measure the total impact, the data are overwhelming. Broad Acres Elementary School made improvements across the board on local, state, and national tests. In 2001, our school was the number one school in our school system for percentage increases in test scores. In 2003, 2004, and 2005, we successfully made Adequate Yearly Progress, meeting or exceeding all requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. Through collaborating with others, I helped turn around an underperforming school despite the obstacles of poverty, race, language, and mobility.

Community Involvement

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

I am committed to strengthening my community through volunteer work and service-oriented activities, because I believe that communities are the backbones of our society. My school and home are parts of a common larger community, because I live within four miles of my school. Because reading and learning are my passions, I volunteer for numerous activities to support the literacy development of families in my neighborhood. This gives me an opportunity to share my knowledge and the joy I find in these activities.

One community event that I help sponsor to promote literacy and family reading time is a "Books and Supper Night." This event is held four times a year and is a favorite of the community. During "Books and Supper Night," families visit the school and check out books from the library. They read to and with one another in cozy areas. Families who attend this event receive free books to add to their personal libraries so they can continue family reading time at home. After reading, a communal dinner is provided for all, encouraging

families to interact with and get to know their neighbors. I find this event to be encouraging for both the children and the parents. The children are delighted at spending quiet, uninterrupted time reading with their parents, and the parents are very proud of their children.

My dedication to my community also is evident through my work to supply families with learning materials in their homes. Many of the families at my school are recent immigrants to the country and are living in poverty. Many lack the necessary language skills and time to assist students with their school work. My colleagues and I wrote and received grants to support this effort. We purchased an electronic learning system, Leap Pads, for students to take home and share with their families. This is beneficial because many families in the community lack quality academic resources that help provide the foundational skills necessary for early success in school. We also purchased portable tape players, books in English and Spanish, and cassette tapes. We record readings of each book on cassette tapes and send them home with students on a rotating basis. This is important because it allows families to enjoy reading together, taking the burden off of parents who struggle with language barriers or illiteracy.

I also coordinate family technology, literacy, and math nights held throughout the year to teach parents how they can support the school curriculum at home. During these events, families learn basic computer skills such as word processing and internet usage; learn simple, inexpensive, and hands-on ideas to use at home; participate in exciting learning activities as a family; and receive materials and resources to use at home.

As a teacher, I believe it is my duty to teach my students, the youngest community members, their civic role. I accomplish this through a thematic unit on communities and mini-lessons on various topics such as littering, gardening, and recycling. Through these lessons, I am influencing my students to be good neighbors and citizens of a community.

Philosophy of Teaching

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

I believe that teaching is a significant, challenging and rewarding profession that is centered on relationships. Teaching is significant because teachers have a direct impact on every person and every profession in our society. Educators are responsible for training and equipping students with the basic skills necessary to successfully perform a job, no matter what the job may be. However, not many people realize that a teacher's job extends beyond teaching a skill or subject matter. Teachers not only prepare students for the workforce, they promote good citizenship, reinforce values, nurture students, and cultivate students' natural talents and abilities. Overall, teachers strive to develop well-rounded individuals who become contributing members of our society. This is an awesome responsibility. To accomplish this, teachers must build relationships with students and their families.

Building relationships is an essential component of my personal teaching style. I believe that students need to feel comfortable working, exploring, taking risks, and learning. I want my students to think of our classroom as a second home. Therefore, I incorporate community building into my daily schedule. I take the time to build a personal relationship with each of my students, because I respect them as individuals and am concerned about their overall wellbeing, not just their academic success. Furthermore, I encourage and facilitate relationship building among the students in my class. We take the time and effort to acknowledge feelings, celebrate successes, comfort friends, and assist with problem solving. Building relationships helps me get to know each student intimately, as well as their personal challenges. Although I have always recognized the importance of

focusing on relationships, I am more cognizant of it since I became a parent. I am the guardian of my teenage cousin, Harvey, whose father died two years ago. As a parent, I am grateful for teachers who take the time to talk with Harvey, offer support, and understand his needs and circumstances and how they may affect his learning and progress at school. My relationship with Harvey also has taught me the importance of establishing relationships with parents, because children cannot always express their feelings. Working with the parents of my students has helped me to better meet the needs of my students. Although fostering relationships is challenging, it is a worthwhile endeavor that serves as a building block for teaching and learning.

The challenge becomes even greater when considering the various academic needs of all my students. I understand that children learn and develop at different rates, and I base my instruction around this understanding. I believe that all students can learn and achieve at high levels if given adequate time and appropriate resources and materials. Therefore, I work with my students and their families to set individualized learning, social, and personal goals. I provide multiple paths, as well as multiple opportunities, for students to meet and exceed these designated goals. I assess each student's starting point and plan a course of action for each of them. For instance, in August two of my students entered my class at very different starting points. Ashley came with no prior school experience and very little English. She was unable to write her name, hold a pencil, or recognize any letters of the alphabet. Her immediate goals were to demonstrate appropriate school behavior, write her name, and recognize the letters in her name. On the other hand, Jamal had been in a year-long prekindergarten program and entered my class speaking English fluently and recognizing all the letters of the alphabet, as well as some words. Furthermore, he could write using some beginning sounds. His immediate goals were to learn more letter sounds, read and write several high frequency words, and read a simple text with support from the teacher. Both students work in the same centers in my class, but utilize materials to meet their specific needs.

It is sometimes difficult to explain how children in my classroom can work on different activities and work towards different goals. I am often asked about equity. Equity to me does not mean that each student receives the same instruction and completes the same task. Rather, I believe equity in a classroom means that each child receives exactly what he or she needs to move forward. I explain this concept to my kindergarten students using The Three Bears as an analogy. Each bear in the story is unique, just like each student in our class is unique. Each bear in the story needs and likes different things, just like students in our class need and like different things. In the story, the porridge might be too hot, too cold, or just right. In our classroom, work can be too hard, too easy, or just right. My students understand that it is my responsibility to help each of them find learning activities that are "just right." There is no greater reward for me than finding activities that are "just right" for each student and helping them to be successful.

I find the rewards of teaching to be immeasurable. In addition to the smiles, hugs, and hand-made cards that I receive on a daily basis, I am privileged to assist and observe my students as they sprout, blossom, and bloom throughout the year. It is an amazing experience to see students like Ashley learning to write her name and learn letters of the alphabet, or to watch Jamal move from approximate spelling to standard spelling when writing his own personal expressions. These particular examples occurred within the first couple of months of kindergarten. The growth of my students throughout the year is truly remarkable. It is even more fulfilling to observe my students take ownership of their accomplishments. Watching a child beam with pride and self-confidence is beyond rewarding.

Education Issues and Trends

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

Public education is plagued by many current issues. One of the most controversial is the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. In fact, the *No Child Left Behind* legislation brings many of the current issues to the forefront of education, including teacher quality, standardized testing, accountability, inadequate funding, the importance of early childhood education, and raising student achievement for disadvantaged students. I will address one of the current issues that is near and dear to my heart—raising student achievement for disadvantaged students. This topic is special to me because I teach at a high-needs school where 90 percent of students are impacted by poverty and 75 percent of students speak a language other than English at home. My school, Broad Acres Elementary School, is furthermore impacted by a 30 percent mobility rate. However, Broad Acres Elementary School has been very successful at meeting the needs of our students despite the fact that studies and data overwhelmingly show that ethnicity, poverty, and language barriers adversely impact student achievement.

I believe there are a number of causes for the discrepancies in student achievement, including limited access to quality early childhood education programs, cultural understandings, and language barriers. Research shows that many disadvantaged children lag behind their counterparts when they enter kindergarten. It furthermore reveals the difficulty that students have catching up to their peers when they start off behind. Children who are not on grade level by the end of second grade often do not enroll in higher level high school courses. In order to close the achievement gap, it is imperative that our neediest students have an early start. Currently, parents pay the bulk of the expenses for preschool education. The quality of preschool programs varies depending on cost. Consequently, many of our neediest students are denied access to a quality early childhood education.

Cultural understandings also play a role in the achievement gap. Our society is becoming more and more diverse. Students from different backgrounds attend school together, each bringing his/her own beliefs and traditions which often differ from the mainstream American beliefs and traditions held by many educators. These cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions, impacting student learning. For instance, in some cultures, time is not relevant. However, educators value time and believe that it is essential to be at school on time and every day. This conflict can result in poor attendance. Students often lose valuable instruction time, causing them to lag behind their peers. Teachers can misinterpret this behavior as a lack of interest or motivation and, in turn, lower their expectations for students.

Language also is a major obstacle to student achievement. Even though many second language learners are capable of speaking and understanding English during a casual conversation, many lack the vocabulary and language structure that are necessary to advance in school. Ruby Payne identifies these two forms of language as casual register and formal register in her book, *A Framework to Understanding Poverty*. It is common for both English Language Learners and students who live in poverty to have difficulty attaining formal register. Consequently many of these students are working below grade level in reading because of comprehension difficulty.

Many steps can be taken to help improve the achievement of high risk students. One step that has been successful at my school is to reduce class size. Reduced class size allows teachers to focus instruction and differentiate to meet the needs of all students. I teach a class of 15 students, and I can meet their specific individual needs by providing small group instruction every day. I would not be able to do this if I had 30 students.

Providing accomplished teachers in every classroom also is a step towards closing the achievement gap. A quality teacher can outweigh the effects of race, poverty, and language barriers. Therefore, disadvantaged students deserve our most accomplished teachers. However, many studies reveal that high risk students are usually taught by novice teachers or teachers who are not adequately prepared or trained. The result is ineffective teaching, low expectations, and low student achievement. Schools can help in this effort by providing training to help teachers become more skillful at working with all students. For instance, my school has focused on understanding the needs of highly impacted students by conducting school wide professional study groups on texts such as [A Framework to Understanding Poverty](#) by Ruby Payne. We also offered the course "Understanding Teaching" based on Jon Sappier's book, [The Skillful Teacher](#), to the entire staff, including paraeducators. As a result, teachers increased their knowledge base and repertoire of strategies to enhance their work with students. My school encouraged teachers to apply for National Board Certification, which is a powerful learning experience focused on student achievement. Recent studies show that National Board Certified teachers are more effective at increasing achievement. Regardless of the vehicle used to attain or create accomplished teachers, it is essential to place the best teachers with disadvantaged students in order to close the achievement gap.

Providing support services to the families of highly impacted students also will help raise student achievement. Poverty is oftentimes accompanied by other circumstances which impede student learning, and many families lack the necessary resources to combat these issues. In simple terms, sick, hungry, and troubled children cannot focus on learning. Schools need to provide services to cover the health, nutritional, and counseling needs of our neediest students and their families. Targeting the "whole child" and realizing that a student's overall well-being is essential to his or her academic success will help to alleviate these concerns and give students and teachers an opportunity to focus on learning.

The Teaching Profession

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

I am proud to be a teacher, and I work to strengthen and improve the teaching profession by training other educators. I do this because I believe that the quality of a child's teacher can be the most important factor in determining his or her success. Therefore, I train and support veteran teachers, new teachers, and student interns who are pursuing education as a career. I strengthen the teaching profession by strengthening teachers.

As a mentor teacher in the Montgomery County Public Schools, I support new teachers as well as student interns from the University of Maryland. This role is significant because it is widely reported that many teachers leave the profession within their first five years, and note a lack of support and isolation as one of the causes. By training and supporting new teachers and student interns, I am not only providing models of quality instruction, but also creating a support system for them, increasing the likelihood that they will remain in the field of education. I begin working with new teachers during week-long curriculum training at the start of each school year. I continue to assist them throughout the year in a variety of ways, including providing additional curriculum training, suggesting instructional strategies and ideas, facilitating discussions, and hosting peer visits. My work with student interns is done on a one-on-one basis where the intern spends a year in my classroom as part of a guided learning experience.

The field of education is constantly evolving, but sometimes it is difficult for experienced teachers to accept and adjust to the changes. I assist in this effort by providing

curriculum training. Through training, I add to their repertoire of instructional strategies and help them create solid, polished lessons to use as models for good instruction. I further the learning by hosting peer visits for these veteran teachers as well. I find that just like my students, many teachers need to see a model of what is expected of them. By welcoming other educators into my classroom, I give them an opportunity to observe best practices in action. For instance, when I began teaching six years ago, the Montgomery County Public Schools began an early childhood initiative, increasing the rigor of the kindergarten program. Many teachers were opposed to the changes and deemed them developmentally inappropriate even though new studies showed that younger children were capable of learning much more than had been expected of them in the past. I was able to implement the new curriculum in my classroom and host peer visits so that other teachers could see that the new curriculum worked and was appropriate for students. Watching a fairly new educator teach disadvantaged students how to acquire foundational skills in literacy and read a simple text was a powerful experience that changed the minds of many of my colleagues.

Accountability is a major concern in the teaching profession. I feel that accountability is a necessary component in education to ensure that all students receive the best education possible and achieve at high levels. However, I believe that teachers are not the only ones who should be held accountable. I feel that teachers, administrators, and students should all be held accountable for student learning, for they each have a significant role and responsibility. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of each are intertwined.

Teachers are responsible for providing students with appropriate content, knowledge, and skills. They are required to present this information in various forms, making it accessible to all learners. Schools are responsible for providing teachers with appropriate training. They also need to provide a thorough curriculum with corresponding resources and materials to ensure the success of teachers and students. Teacher evaluation systems also are an important factor in accountability for schools and teachers and should be evaluated to determine effectiveness. One innovative approach that my school system has taken is to align the teacher evaluation system with the Five Core Propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. While pursuing National Board Certification, I discovered that reflection is an essential component of good teaching. I believe that teachers who have the ability to reflect are ever evolving and hold themselves accountable for student learning. I realize that good teachers are not necessarily those who have the most successful lessons or the class with the best test scores. Good teachers are those who have the ability and the insight to reflect on a lesson, understand what went well or what went wrong and search for strategies to make it better the next time.

Students also should share the accountability because they are ultimately responsible for their own learning. Even with excellent instruction, a thoughtful curriculum, and an abundance of resources, students need to put forth effective effort to succeed. Students should be taught this belief and given tools to assist in self-evaluation. When determining accountability, standardized tests cannot be the sole basis of what is accomplished in the classroom. On the contrary, multiple measures must be utilized to determine student learning and accountability. I believe these measures could include, but are not limited to, teacher observations, classroom performance, classroom grades, classroom assessments, portfolios, district assessments, and standardized assessments. I believe these measures should be included because accountability should consider and measure individual student learning and progress in addition to determining if students meet a specified standard. It is important to acknowledge student growth, even if a student does not meet a designated standard. It is quite possible that a student can make significant growth without achieving a standard, depending on his or her starting point.

Overall, accountability is a very complex issue to define and determine. Most people believe that some form of accountability is necessary. However, determining what that form should be is not as easy. I believe that flexibility is the key, because schools, teachers, and students are all unique. One size fits all simply will not work.

National Teacher of the Year

As the 2006 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?

If given the opportunity to serve as the National Teacher of the Year, I would emphasize the importance of early childhood education. I would address this topic because investing in early childhood education has long-lasting benefits for students and our society. Unfortunately, the significance of early childhood education has been minimized and/or overlooked by many public school systems. Primarily, we have trusted private facilities, daycare, and babysitters to prepare students for schools. As a kindergarten teacher, I know firsthand that many students enter school each year ill-equipped. Many lack age-appropriate oral language skills, book skills, and any knowledge of the alphabet.

Emphasizing quality early childhood education can have numerous benefits. Some of the benefits which have been proven in various studies include academic and social development. Many of these gains would help alleviate some of the challenges that schools face today, including increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged students. Research shows that if a child falls behind during his early years, he is more likely to continue to fall behind. As a result of attending a quality early childhood program, students develop better social, cognitive, and verbal skills. They are less likely to be retained or need remedial or special education services. Students improve in long-term academic outcomes and are more likely to graduate.

I believe that early childhood education is a topic that is relevant and important to all educators, because it creates a trickle effect. Five years ago, the Montgomery County Public Schools invested in early childhood by revising the prekindergarten and kindergarten curricula to be more rigorous and added full day kindergarten classes for the neediest students. As these students progress through elementary school, they are achieving at higher levels than any other classes before them. Our school system is now focusing on adding rigor to the middle school curriculum to accommodate the needs of our students. Just imagine the implications for high school and higher education.

Our economy also benefits from quality early childhood programs. Schools spend less money on remedial services, and students are more prepared to meet the demands of the workforce. Furthermore, students who attend these programs become better citizens who earn more money, pay more taxes, and commit fewer crimes. The economic benefits of investment in early childhood programs are far-reaching.

I believe that all students should have an opportunity to attend a quality early childhood program. Therefore, I am in support of optional, publicly funded, three-year-old programs for high risk students; optional, publicly funded four-year-old prekindergarten programs for all students; and mandatory full-day kindergarten programs for all students. I believe that each of these programs should have clearly identified learning standards.

Letters of Recommendation

November 4, 2005
Montgomery County Public Schools
Rockville, Maryland

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pride that I support the nomination of Ms. Kimberly Oliver for the National Teacher of the Year. Ms. Oliver's outstanding tenure as a kindergarten teacher and leader in her school parallels the successful comprehensive reform taking place in the Montgomery County Public Schools, the 17th largest school district in the nation (140,000) and one of the most diverse. As a superintendent of 30 years in five states, I have worked with tens of thousands of teachers. Ms. Oliver distinguishes herself as one of the most exceptionally talented and committed educators in the profession.

Ms. Oliver's career began five years ago at Broad Acres Elementary, a school of 500 Head Start through Grade 5 students. With children coming from more than 31 countries and speaking 28 languages, it is the district's highest poverty school, with nearly 90% of students qualifying for federally-subsidized meals. In 2001, Broad Acres faced restructuring by the state as a result of declining test scores. Ms. Oliver played an instrumental role in the successful reorganization of the school. In 2002, kindergarten students at Broad Acres mastered early reading skills at higher rates than students in other schools with full day kindergarten. At the end of three years, Broad Acres students achieved Adequate Yearly Progress, meeting or exceeding all requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, for the 2003-2004 school year.

The success at Broad Acres dispelled the myth that students of poverty and limited English proficiency cannot achieve at high levels. Their accomplishments served to strengthen our efforts to close the achievement gap and generated countywide support for the district's reforms, including full-day kindergarten and reduced class size in the most highly impacted schools. Since 2001, the countywide percentage of kindergarten students meeting text-reading benchmarks increased from 39% to 71% percent. Remarkably, lower income students in full-day kindergarten matched their peers in text reading in half-day kindergarten in more affluent communities.

Ms. Oliver's contributions to the success of Broad Acres are exemplified by her personal investment in each student. She is very clear in her expectations that all children will meet or exceed standards and is unwavering in her commitment to their achievement. Ms. Oliver has a rare gift for touching the hearts and minds of her students, inspiring them to aim high and believe in their potential. She works with students in a way that allows them to flourish in an environment where their various cultures, languages, and experiences are respected. She is masterful at using data to monitor her students' progress and making adjustments to instruction to meet the individual needs of each child. Ms. Oliver fulfilled the district's mission to "raise the bar and close the gap." Her kindergarten students were performing skills that had previously been accomplished in first grade. Ms. Oliver's success was a catalyst for changing the entire instructional program beyond kindergarten and increasing the level of rigor throughout the school.

Ms. Oliver has high expectations for her own professional development and that of her colleagues. She enthusiastically seeks and excels at a variety of leadership roles that challenge her and other teachers to higher levels of performance. She mentors new teachers and motivates other educators through her example. Ms. Oliver is not only an inspiration to her students and her colleagues, but she is also an advocate for parents, valuing their role as their child's first teacher. We are proud and fortunate that Ms. Oliver is in a position to influence the lives of so many children in Montgomery County and believe that teachers across the nation can benefit from her experience.

Respectfully,
Jerry D. Weast, Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools

November 1, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

It is an honor for me to recommend Ms. Kimberly Oliver for the National Teacher of the Year for 2006. I am a parent of two of Ms. Oliver's former students. My son, Louigene Cadet, entered her classroom right out of Head Start when Ms. Oliver was a new teacher right out of college. When I heard that Louigene was going to have a brand new teacher I was concerned. He would be at school all day for the first time and I thought he needed to have an experienced teacher who was smart and strong. He needed a teacher who could handle him with the right amount of discipline, but would be caring at the same time. Because I volunteered in her classroom, I found out for myself that I did not need to be concerned about Ms. Oliver. She is a great teacher. She knows how to teach all kinds of children. She knows how to talk to them so they listen and all of her students know that she cares about them. Louigene started kindergarten knowing only some of his letters. When he finished kindergarten, he could read the small books by himself. Many of the children in Ms. Oliver's classroom had never been to any kind of school before and had not spoken English before. She made them all feel accepted. She made them all feel like they were smart and could learn anything. I asked Louigene every day how he liked school and he always said good things about Ms. Oliver. Ms. Oliver regularly contacted me and the other parents to tell us how well our children were doing. I always knew what was happening with Louigene and how I could help him at home because Ms. Oliver was so good about calling us. I was so happy when my next son Lawrence Cadet became Ms. Oliver's student. I kept wondering who would be Lawrence's teacher and Ms. Oliver did not tell me ahead of time. When I found out, I could not be more pleased. I told Ms. Oliver she is our "family teacher." You know, sort of like a family doctor. Ms. Oliver was laughing. But it is true. She is interested in all of my family and she has helped us all in some way. Ms. Oliver is very easy to talk to and laugh with and she makes everyone feel comfortable around her.

Because of Ms. Oliver, I became a volunteer at Broad Acres. I was scared at first because I did not speak good English. But Ms. Oliver has high expectations for parents, just like she does for her students. Some teachers did not ask parents to volunteer because they did not think they could help as much because of their English skills. Ms. Oliver expected the same from me as she did from the parents who do speak English. Even though I was nervous about volunteering at first, Ms. Oliver made me feel very comfortable. She asked me to help and she did it in a respectful way so that I felt that I could make a difference. I helped in the classroom, I did things at home, I went on field trips with the class, I worked with some children who were bilingual, and I helped to translate for other parents. I saw for myself how much the students learned from Ms. Oliver, but I learned very much from Ms. Oliver also. I learned how I could help my own children at home. I learned that every parent, regardless of where they come from, what language they speak, or how much education they have themselves, can help their child and their school. It takes a special kind of teacher to draw that out of parents—a teacher like Ms. Oliver.

My sons are good students because of what they learned in kindergarten. Louigene works hard and likes to learn. Lawrence is very smart and is doing very well in reading and math. I still volunteer at the school and help translate for children who only speak Creole. We have to thank our family teacher, Ms. Oliver, for how all of us have grown. She has affected us in ways that will last a lifetime.

Please consider Ms. Oliver for the National Teacher of the Year Award. She is truly a very nice person and an excellent teacher. Maybe someday she will be a principal!

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Ernie M. Cadet

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland 20850
October 31, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

It is our great pleasure to support the nomination of Ms. Kim Oliver for the National Teacher of the Year. We have had the honor of participating in Ms. Oliver's professional development since she began her teaching career and witnessing her many accomplishments as a masterful teacher. From the start, it was obvious that she was a highly reflective professional with the desire to offer the best to each individual student. Ms. Oliver is now beginning her sixth year as a kindergarten teacher with the teaching skills of an effective veteran, far beyond her years.

Ms. Oliver launched her teaching career at Broad Acres Elementary School in 2000, the same year the school system implemented its comprehensive reform of early childhood education. The district focused its efforts on teacher quality, the primary strategy for raising student achievement. One of the new initiatives, the Professional Growth System, is designed to improve teacher quality by giving teachers support and ongoing professional development. As the consulting teacher and staff development teacher assigned to Broad Acres, we saw firsthand how adept Ms. Oliver has been at using these resources to improve her own skills, but more importantly, how she has selflessly shared her learning with her colleagues. Ms. Oliver took the initiative to become a teacher leader at Broad Acres at a time when the school was in jeopardy of potential state reconstitution for low academic performance. The school has undergone a vast paradigm shift to a collaborative and empowered environment, and Ms. Oliver was instrumental in building this norm by taking on new professional challenges and leadership roles generally reserved for more senior staff members. She has served as a team leader for the Pre-K and Kindergarten team, as well as a member of the school wide Professional Development committee and a study group on Learning Walks. Ms. Oliver's passion for improving teaching and learning extends beyond her own school. She also has been a district trainer of new teachers and is always a gracious and willing mentor when frequently called upon to have visitors observe in her classroom. Ms. Oliver worked successfully two years ago to become National Board certified and supports 11 colleagues in a similar endeavor. Ms. Oliver has given back to others, many times over, the professional development resources she was afforded early on.

When you walk into Ms. Oliver's classroom, one cannot help but notice that this is a special place. Ms. Oliver's high standards and expectations for her students are evident throughout the instructional day. Her actions and words transmit the key belief messages: Learning is Important, You Can Do It, I Won't Give Up On You, and Effective Effort Produces Results, fostering a community of self-confident young learners. Ms. Oliver's strength of incorporating Multiple Intelligences into her instructional design thoroughly enhances her students' abilities to build background knowledge and gain information. Ms. Oliver's numerous strategies, matched to student needs and frequent checking for understanding, as well as her masterful use of formative and summative data, have enabled her to tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs of her students. Broad Acres serves 500 students with a mobility rate of over 30 percent. Nearly 90 percent of the students at Broad Acres live in poverty. Approximately 75 percent have parents who do not speak English at home. The school population is made up of 67 percent Hispanic students, 21 percent African American, 11 percent Asian American, and less than 1 percent White and American Indian. The progress that students have made at Broad Acres is remarkable given the challenges reflected in its demographic profile.

Ms. Oliver has been an instrumental force in improving student achievement at her school. Broad Acres has met and exceeded Adequate Yearly Progress for the last three years. The foundation she has laid in kindergarten has resulted in dramatic increases in the reading and mathematics scores of second grade students on national standardized tests. Ms. Oliver is the ultimate professional who is thoughtful about her practices, dedicated to her school community, and committed to excellence. Ms. Oliver's personal and professional devotion to her students is evident daily through her skillful teaching, wonderfully caring relationships with her students, and her exceptional communication skills with the parents of her students. She is the consummate team player who has helped to raise the quality of teaching and learning among her colleagues and students at Broad Acres Elementary School. It is hard to believe that her students are only in kindergarten when you see Ms. Oliver's students in action. There is not one wasted minute of instructional time during any day. Together, they create quite a symphony of learning!

Sincerely,
Diane Hoffman, In-District Trainer
Office of Organization & Development
Montgomery County Public Schools
Former Consulting Teacher at Broad Acres ES
Acres ES

David Chia, Principal Intern
Burning Tree Elementary School
Montgomery County Public Schools
Former Staff Development Teacher at Broad Acres ES