

February 22, 2024

Sunflower Elementary First Grade Teacher Named Kansas Master Teacher



Art on the door that reads “one four three” greets all who enter Jessica Brown’s first grade classroom at Sunflower Elementary. Instead of indicating the room number, 143 stands for the number of letters in each word of “I love you.” It’s a number, Brown says, that embodies her teaching practice and classroom culture, where she sees her students as “forever classroom family.”

The dean of Emporia State University’s Teachers College called Brown in her classroom Wednesday with the news that she is one of seven Kansas Master Teachers. The district named her its Lawrence Master Teacher last spring and nominated her for the state honor.

Brown’s students and colleagues celebrated the surprise announcement with posters, flowers, hugs, and party horns. Even class pets Lulu the lizard and Morton the guinea pig joined in the fun, with Morton taking a victory lap on the rug in the bed of a remote-controlled truck.

Brown wrote in her state application that each day, her students meet the best Miss Brown she can be that day. “My classroom is a reflection of life itself. It is where life is shared, life is viewed, life is gained, life is changed, and life is handled together. This will continue to be the truth I strive to uphold, practice, and embody as long as I am given the opportunity,” she wrote.

Brown has taught at Sunflower for four years and previously, Hillcrest for six. Before joining the district, she taught one year in a dual language kindergarten classroom, incorporating 10% of her instruction in Spanish, in Emporia.

“She invests an incredible amount of time and effort into every lesson, response, and question, ensuring that each student feels valued and supported in her classroom. Jess radiates warmth and care, creating an inclusive and nurturing learning environment that fosters growth and engagement,” wrote a teaching colleague and parent of one of Brown’s former students.

A student wrote, “Ms. Brown was my first grade teacher. I am now ten, and I still think of her as my favorite teacher. She goes out of her way to help all of her students. Ms. Brown impacted my life for the better. She is the best teacher I have ever had. She continues to be an inspiration to my life.”

Master Teachers receive \$1,000 from the Bank of America Charitable Foundation and will be recognized during a banquet on Master Teacher Day on April 3 at Emporia State University. Established in 1954, the Kansas Master Teacher awards honor exemplary professional educators. Read more at www.emporia.edu/masterteacher.