



XIII  
Region Service Center

Secondary  
Elementary or Secondary

New Braunfels ISD #046901  
District Name and ID number

2015 Candidate Application Form

I. General Information and signatures

Nominee: First/Last Name Kevin Korpi

Nominee's e-mail: work kkorpi@nbsd.org personal: kwworpi@gmail.com

Home Address 134 Mittmann Circle

New Braunfels TX 78132 (830) 632-5788  
City State Zip Code Telephone

School Name New Braunfels High School

School Address 2551 Loop 337 North

New Braunfels TX 78130 (830) 627-6000  
City State Zip Code Telephone

Educator Certification Program  Regular  Alternative Area of Certification Secondary Math

Major Subject Area B.S. Mathematics Grade Level 10, 11, 12

Total Years of Teaching Experience 15 Years in Present Position 15

I hereby give my permission that any or all of the attached materials or photos that may be taken of me can be shared with persons interested in promoting, in a variety of media, the National and Texas Teacher of the Year Programs.  
Signature of Nominee Kevin W. Korpi

Principal: First/Last Name Kara Bock

Principal's e-mail address kbock@nbsd.org Phone # (830) 627-6060

Signature of Principal \_\_\_\_\_

District Superintendent: First/Last Name Randy Moczygemba

Superintendent's e-mail address rmoczygemba@nbsd.org Phone # (830) 643-5705

Signature of Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_

District Public Information Officer: First/Last Name: Rebecca Villarreal

Public Information Officer's e-mail: rmvillarreal@nbsd.org Phone # (830) 643-5762

The deadline for the full application to be received at your ESC office is 5 p.m., Friday, June 13, 2014.

\*\*10 point minimum font size. Please reference nomination rules for complete instructions\*\*

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## II. Educational History and Professional Development

### A. Colleges and universities and post-graduate studies, with degrees earned and dates attended

Southwest Texas State / Texas State University 1999 – 2001 Post-Graduate Certification

University of Texas 1994 – 1996 BS Mathematics, Academic Achievement Distinction

Texas A&M University 1992 – 1994 Student—College of Chemical Engineering

### B. Employment history, with time periods, grade levels and subject areas

New Braunfels High School 1999 – 2014

- Pre AP Precalculus 2000 – 2014; AP Calculus AB 2000 – 2014; AP Calculus BC 2008 – 2014
- SAT Prep Class 2000 – 2005, 2013, 2014; Summer School 2000 – 2005, 2013
- AP Statistics 2005, 2010; Geometry 2004 – 2005; Algebra I 1999 – 2000;  
Algebra I Remedial 1999 – 2000; and Algebra II 1999 – 2000

### C. Professional association memberships, offices held and other relevant activities

- ACCEPTED as a member of the following professional and social organizations: The National Council for the Teaching of Mathematics, The Mathematical Association of America, The American Federation of Teachers, Who's Who Among America's Teachers, and Mensa 1999 – 2014
- HIRED as a College Board Consultant to grade/read AP Calculus exams during the summer 2006 – 2010
- PREPARED NBHS students for UIL mathematics competitions in Number Sense, Mathematics, and Calculator Applications 2000 – 2014
- COACHED NBHS AP Calculus students to a 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish out of 101 teams in the 4<sup>th</sup> annual TLU Bulldog Calculus Bowl 2014
- TRANSPORTED the NBHS mascot to varsity football games 2001 – 2014
- WORKED the chains at NBHS home football games 2003 – 2014
- EMCEED NBHS Pep-Rallies 2003, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2014
- PROVIDED Play-by-play and color commentary for NBHS Powder-Puff Football games 2008 – 2014
- RECORDED and posted on YouTube all of my Precalculus and Calculus lessons 2013 – 2014
- ANNOUNCED senior graduates' names at NBHS graduation ceremonies 2013, 2014
- EMCEED Senior Theme Dinner for NBHS Project Graduation 2010 – 2013

- PRESENTED the one-hour discussion “Directional Vectors, The Law of Cosines, and Linear versus Angular Velocity” at the annual Conference for the Advancement of Mathematics Teaching, San Antonio, TX 2001
- SPONSORED the high school math club 2000 – 2012
- SERVED on several campus committees including the following: AP Appropriations Committee 2003-2014, Principal Selection Committee 2004, Campus Technology Committee 2002, Class Rank Committee 2001
- ATTENDED Algebra I TEXTEAMS training 1990-2000

D. Staff development leadership activity and leadership activity in the training of future teachers

- PROVIDED feedback and guidance to many AP Calculus and Precalculus teachers both locally and around the world via my website and website curriculum at [www.korpiworld.com](http://www.korpiworld.com) 2010 – 2014
- HOSTED Texas State intern as the cooperating teacher 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005-2010, 2012 – 2014
- DELIVERED the keynote address for the Oak Run Middle School NJHS induction 2013
- GAVE the keynote address for NBHS NHS induction 2006, 2012
- FILMED a pilot episode of “Precal Matters” for NBISD TV 2006
- HOSTED and wrote a weekly math show “Déjà vu, It’s Algebra 2” for NBISD TV 2005
- NOMINATED for a Lonestar Emmy for writing and hosting “That Geometry Show” on NBISD TV 2004
- PRESENTED GT in-service seminar to the New Braunfels High School Math Department 2003, 2008, 2011
- RECEIVED professional certification from College Board as an AP teacher 2007

E. Awards and other recognition

- NBISD Secondary Teacher of the Year 2013 – 2014
- NBHS Teacher of the Year 2013 – 2014
- NBHS “Hero” to a graduating senior 2000 – 2014
- NBHS Teacher of the Month September 2000, January 2003, November 2007, March 2012, September 2013
- NBHS “Beyond the Walls” Award 2009
- NBISD Secondary Teacher of the Year 2003 – 2004
- NBHS Teacher of the Year 2003 – 2004
- Trinity Prize Recipient 2003 – 2004
- NBHS Senior Favorite Teacher of the Year 2003 – 2004

### III. Professional Biography

“Don’t go into teaching. You can do so much better.”

Those were my late mother’s words when I told her I was quitting my job building homes to take a job as a math teacher at my Alma Mater, New Braunfels High School. It wasn’t the first time I had disappointed her, but it would be the last—I had hoped.

I had become a homebuilder against her will, “wasting” my math degree, which came after I had “squandered” my potential as a chemical engineer, which followed my “frivolling away” the hopes she had had of me becoming a doctor, lawyer . . . or priest.

Not only was my mother my biggest fan, calling me her “deep thinker,” she was also a former school teacher, lasting only two years before finding “meaningful” work as an office manager. In her eyes, she wanted me to be the best I could be, and, if I was not going to wear a holy collar, I should go into a profession where I could make the most money.

Drawing on Archimedes’ principle, I assuaged her concerns by assuring her that if my influence on the world was a lever, by teaching, I was simply moving the fulcrum to gain a greater “mechanical” advantage, thus, increasing my lever of potential. With this, I convinced my mother that I would not be wasting my talent or life, but rather using it to develop and help create meaningful lives for future generations and moving, as Archimedes said, the world through the lives of the students I prepared to be the lawyers, doctors, priests, and office managers of tomorrow.

Today, I try to open doors for my students and empower them with the tools and confidence to choose and walk through the ones most important to them, doors I know exist, because they were there for me. Mrs. Kathy Birdwell, my own Precalculus teacher at NBHS, had managed to track me down after Mrs. Bonnie Leitch, my AP Calculus teacher at NBHS, went to another district. She had prearranged for me, with no classroom experience, a homebuilder, to become the new AP Calculus teacher at my Alma Matter. How could I say, “no” and betray her confidence in me? With that, it was all set—I was going to become a high school math teacher. I dropped my hammer, convinced my mother it was the right decision, picked up the chalk, and I have never looked back.

I learned many things in college while earning my post-graduate certification, but most of what I needed to know about how to be a successful teacher, I learned in ninety minutes from another special person who came to my rescue unsolicited—Mr. Bill Hollas. Mr. Hollas was starting his 41<sup>st</sup> year in education in 1999. Luckily for me on that first day, I had a 1<sup>st</sup> period conference, and Mr. Hollas was assigned to teach Algebra I that same period . . . in *my*

classroom! In my eyes, he had been sent by Providence. He graciously agreed to let me stay and watch while he taught that morning, and I have never been more attentive and observant than I was during that 90-minute 1<sup>st</sup> period class.

As the bell rang to transfer to 2<sup>nd</sup> period, Mr. Hollas gathered his things to move to his next classroom, but not before an encouraging pat on the back and some words, which to this day I still remember: “*Students want to know how much you care before they care how much you know.*” “Okay, got it,” I anxiously thought. It was now my turn. I have never been more nervous. When the tardy bell rang, I faced the awkward, innocent, and ready stares of 25 freshmen all dressed in their new clothes, ready to solve for  $x$ . I don’t know who was more apprehensive and unsure, the students or me. As I opened my mouth, I did so with all the confidence I could muster from the more than 40 years of collective experience I felt I now shared with Mr. Hollas, never minding that *he* provided it all. The second word was easier than the first, and the third more natural than the previous. Before I had finished my first sentence, I was at ease, and it all began to feel instinctive and familiar. I knew that I was finally where I was meant to be.

It has been 15 years since that first day, and though I still get just as excited and anxious before each and every class, it is now because I know that the next 50 minutes are going to be a new adventure filled with original, meaningful experiences for both me and my students. I can hardly wait for the tardy bell to ring to deliver a mixture of mathematical maxims and mirth, to teach a curriculum that instills joyful rigor without ruin, and to use my intellect, alacrity, and creativity to create that perfect classroom environment filled with manageable, positive pressure. The relationships I build with my young scholars, enable me to demand the most of them, pushing them to the edge, while giving them the support and incentive to stay there, all while I, the Jedi math chef, continuously, secretly, and innocuously pull them out of their comfort zones, hiding much more than mathematical pabulum, but relevant life lessons that transcend the classroom, inside the delicious (and surreptitiously salutary) mathematical meatloaf I serve daily. No one leaves without a well-fed heart, soul, and mind.

Teaching is not unlike a long marathon race, and for me, the finish line is still a long way off. As I am nowhere near that finish line, I believe my most significant contributions and accomplishments in education remain to be realized. A race, though, is carried out one step at a time, and I think the small, candid, earnest contributions that I make each day in and out of my classroom are what matter most, giving all my enthusiasm, expertise, effort, effulgence, and energy into every lesson, event, or activity so that at the end of the day, I’ve left it all on the classroom floor, and my students have left my domain empowered to think for themselves and to continue their education without me. In the final analysis, it is not what I have done for them, but rather what I have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful.

#### **IV. Community Involvement**

Students need to feel connected to get the most out of their education—connection to their friends, family, teachers, schools, and communities. Through my own connections with the community, other professional educators, and my ubiquitous presence at school events both on and off campus, I am able to fulfill my obligation as a teacher to help my students make these important, integrated connections.

As a former grader of AP calculus exams, I have forged many great friendships and professional connections with some of the best math teachers in the world. These relationships have not only been a source of great professional growth, but have also helped me to create a larger community centered around education. Through my curriculum website, I am able to connect with other teachers and students around the world, providing and receiving valuable feedback. This ever-expanding network of professionals and learners is a great vaccine against the isolation that often comes with teaching—while I’m trying to figure out a better way to teach “Lagrange Error Bound” to my calculus students in Texas, I know my friend Joe in Indiana is doing the same thing, and I know that we can easily get in touch with each other to brainstorm effective methods.

Having attended the same local high school at which I now teach provides me with first-hand access to my district’s rich history and traditions as well as the responsibility to share my experiences with my students and colleagues. In this sense, I aim to serve as a positive role model and a bastion of tradition for school and community involvement by participating in or leading many school activities. Whether I’m organizing a faculty dodge ball team, devouring jalapeños to raise money for our school, dressing up like the Easter bunny for a school event, infusing spirit at our school’s pep rallies, emceeding school events, hauling the school mascot to football games, giving keynote speeches at student recognition ceremonies, sponsoring the Math Club, coaching U.I.L. academic events, or producing Emmy-nominated math programs for our district’s public television network, I am always willing to go the extra mile for my students and school. I do the many things I do outside my contractual obligations because I want to, but also because it makes my work in the classroom easier and more rewarding.

My students believe in me as a calculus teacher because they see me researching new methods, reading a mathematical book, or corresponding with a fellow AP colleague via email or phone. They are willing to work hard for me because they know I am working hard for them. They want to improve themselves, in part, because, based on the relationships I have built with them, relationships that have grown out of my earnest interest in their own interests, they don’t want to disappoint me, nor I, them.

To my students and parents, my classroom door is always open.

## V. Philosophy of Teaching

I realize that first, and foremost, teaching is a human endeavor that involves complex, intimate interactions between real people. Kids must come before curriculum, students before subject matter, and people before pedagogy. From day one, a student must get the sense that you, the teacher, are friend not foe, an ally not an alien, and that the journey ahead will be worthwhile. Although there might be difficulties along the way, the student trusts in your expertise, is willing to take on the trek because of your energy and enthusiasm, and is able to make the journey himself because of the support you will give him. Most importantly, the trip will be fun, such that the student will want to return again and again on his own, the rest of his life, without you, the teacher, to lead him. As Anatole France stated, “Teaching is the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards.”

Perhaps the worst advice I’ve ever heard from the collective conscience of educators was, “Don’t smile until December.” Pushing students into mindless compliance does not establish a highly oxygenated, healthy classroom climate. It is true that routines must be established and students must learn self-discipline, but rigorous caring is one of the most powerful ways of effectively managing a classroom and maintaining control. We should be smiling as students walk in the door, every day, establishing a positive rapport with each one. This rapport gives them the gift of dignity, and helps to build deeper, meaningful relationships between teacher and student. These relationships then forge a mutual respect between teacher and student, and among peers. It is finally this galvanized respect that enables rigor—rigor that then takes place in the presence of high expectations in the joyful surroundings of a community of like-minded learners. These high expectations, which are not merely articulated, but are also palpably felt, apply not only to student learning, but to teachers as well.

Teachers are a vital personality in students’ lives, and I realize that I have the potential to transform these lives for better or worse. I want to help my students become rational, thoughtful, and conscientious adults, who have an informed imagination and the restraint to use it wisely. My math curriculum is only the raw material I use with care, patience, and expertise to help my students become who I want them to be, and who they deserve to be. I care about not just filling their minds with mathematical facts, but also how they use their minds, and all that they have learned, especially when no one is looking—a benefit that transcends the classroom and that goes beyond any formal testing situation. I want to help them develop what Jaime Escalante called “*ganas*,” the desire to succeed, or the “grit” that Angela Duckworth believes is the key to success, or that quiet, never-quit quality my Finnish grandfather possessed that enabled him to come to America alone at age 13, join the U.S. cavalry, and help General Pershing try to capture Pancho Villa, something he called “*sisu*.” I want to leave my students with a deserved confidence and a honed habit in the use

of their mind. I have been able to accomplish this by being more than just a high school math teacher, but by doing all the other little things that matter most to smart, impressionable, young adults.

Teachers are energized by students who are engaged and eager to learn, and students are energized by teachers who are excited and passionate about what they are doing. Enthusiasm matters. It's what I call, mathematically, the  $x$  factor. If students don't have it, I give it to them. If students already have it, I give them more. While enthusiasm amplifies the effect of other qualities, it is not the only thing: pertinacity, intelligence, wit, and being informed also matter. Transparently loving one's subject matters, and teaching and acting as if it is the most important subject also matters. But style is never a substitute for substance, so expertise in one's subject area, at a deep and sophisticated level also matters. Being so sure of oneself as a teacher and scholar that one can readily and easily admit to not knowing something matters. Being able to go off on a tangent confidently, comfortably, and competently, deviating from the lesson, to explore new ideas and concerns that stem from one's or a student's curiosity, matters. Being visibly engaged with important ideas and current events or enthralled with a new book, mathematical concept, or the latest smartphone app matters.

English author Thomas Fuller once said, "good is not good where better is expected." Currently, our students in the United States rank near the bottom in math and science, a place I am personally not comfortable with—our student deserve better. I truly believe that if a student can do math, that student can do *anything*, for the undertaking of the mastery of mathematics, as the late mathematician Cletus Oakley stated, "cannot be replaced by any other activity that will train and develop man's purely logical faculties to the same level of rationality," for it, in the sage words of polymath John Arbuthnot "adds vigor to the mind, frees it from prejudice, credulity, and superstition." I feel very privileged to be in a position to be teaching today's youth and tomorrow's leaders this unique discipline of mathematics rigorously and joyfully. My students know how to get deeply into a topic, they have seen its complexity, and they have been held accountable for it in a demanding exhibition. My students know the nature of high-quality work and are, therefore, able to demand it of themselves later in life. My students realize that failure is part of the learning equation, is only temporary, and, as Henry Ford said, is simply the "opportunity to begin again more intelligently." They understand the real goal in any computation is insight, not just another number. They look forward to the daily adventure into the unknown with me as their guide, marching not down a well-cleared paved road, but rather journeying into a strange and novel wilderness where there are no maps, wielding their mathematical machetes to create new paths, absorbing the obstacles and each new experience and insight along the way, knowing they will soon be navigating the world without me as their guide, slowing them down with questions and jokes, and they are looking forward for that opportunity.

## VI. Education Issues and Trends

The educational issue I feel most passionate and concerned about is the recruitment, training, and development of new and future teachers. Through a perfect storm of events, I was blessed, and landed in public education, exactly where I need and want to be, but it was a career path that chose me, not that I chose. We need to attract the next generation of teachers proactively, for the education of our youth is too important to leave to chance.

The development of educators must take on a new level of respect and priority. As our current national teaching program prescribes, once a prospective teacher completes his theory-based pedagogical coursework and minimal (if any) hours of student teaching, he often find himself pragmatically thrown into the deep end of the classroom, with up to 200 students and little to no supervision, guidance, or support. Promising new teachers often feel isolated, scared, and ill-equipped to handle the demands of the job, and, consequently, they leave the profession before they ever have the opportunity to really master it. Teaching is a skill that develops over time with practice, feedback, guidance, and on-going education, and so we must invest the necessary resources to nurture emerging teachers.

Education colleges must take a more hands-on, clinical approach to the nuts-and-bolts of teaching, like classroom management, lesson planning, and dealing with parents. These colleges must form partnerships with the arts and science colleges to ensure that the teachers of the future are not just pedagogical experts, but experts of content as well. Pedagogy is important, but content matters, too, especially at the secondary level. A purely expert pedagogue would have a difficult time teaching secondary math, but this is exactly what is happening all too often in middle and high schools across America. Currently, almost 40% of middle school math teachers, and about half of high school math teachers, either did not major in mathematics or are not certified to teach it! It should not be surprising, then, that in such a hierarchal discipline such as mathematics, roughly 44% of graduating seniors in America are not ready for college-level mathematics. Remediation courses are big money for colleges, but a bigger indictment to public education. We can, and will do better. We must reconfigure our nation's teaching education to prepare teachers for a 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. We must additionally alter the public's perception of education as one of a labor model to a professional model requiring creative, innovative, and specialized training. A step in this direction might involve creating rational economic incentives for things such as teaching expertise, empirical evidence of success, and tougher teaching assignments, rather than a monetary remuneration model that is directly proportional to years served.

Of the approximately 3.7 million teachers currently in public education in the U.S., an estimated 1.6 million (43%) are expected to retire within the next 7 years by the year 2021. These teachers will need to be replaced. This means a dramatic revolution in the recruitment and training of new teachers could positively and profoundly change the

profession in a very short period of time. We can advance the teaching profession and foster a public respect for learning by recruiting and selecting highly educated teachers who are rigorously trained and prepared in both pedagogy and content. Once teachers are carefully selected and trained, they can be trusted to develop a core curriculum, given the autonomy to run their classrooms, and to create a serious, palpable intellectual culture nationwide. This will lead to better teaching and better learning and better teaching—a magnificent upward spiral and a positive feedback loop!

For the many dedicated, talented, and knowledgeable current and new teachers already in the classroom, veteran, master teachers in a school can and should play a vital and central role in mentoring these educators, and need to be given the time and support for such collaboration, a role which, indubitably, enriches the veteran teacher's practice as well. When I began teaching, I was fortunate to have an entire network of colleagues to support me in those first few, crucial, make-or-break years, providing me with guidance, advice, and materials. Without this outpouring of love, encouragement, and sustained assistance, I doubt I would be teaching today. I know firsthand how valuable and essential this kind of support is to new and struggling teachers, and it should be the norm, not the exception. We must invest significant resources into this critical area in order to improve and retain our current teachers, to make them feel valued and respectful as all professionals should.

We all have different areas of expertise, and our school as a whole depends on our individual successes, but as teachers, we have a responsibility to network with other teachers, including (or especially) those with a different area of expertise. This shared model of learning not only creates a sense of professionalism and community, but also helps us escape the solitary confinement of our own classroom. There is a psychic benefit and pride that comes from being part of any successful enterprise, where each participant has a shared vision and a common goal with everyone else. It is energizing and synergistic to unselfishly accomplish excellence. Developing relationships among fellow teachers in a school or establishing professional contacts beyond one's campus is just as important to the growth and development of any teacher and, therefore, the success of a student, as the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. Unfortunately, it is all too easy for teachers to work in isolation staying in "their" classroom, teaching "their" students "their" subjects, using "their" conference period to do "their" work.

I have enjoyed "taking" several of my colleague's courses during my conference period over the years, and I have welcomed many fellow teachers, administrators, interns, and even parents into my own classroom during my lessons. The feedback, critique, and constructive criticism I have given and received from this open-door philosophy has been a valuable source of broadening my perspective, improving my craft, and advancing the teaching profession.

## VII. The Teaching Profession

Teachers must be their own advocates. To advance the teaching profession, teachers must be able to network with other educators and be willing to share best practices. As a teacher who has personally benefited from the input of caring colleagues, today I freely offer my own encouragement and support to others. I have many years' experience working with technology in the classroom, and in most cases, I have taught myself how to use and integrate these technologies into my lessons. On my public website, I have made available my own math curriculum, including notes, worksheets, practice tests, summary sheets, and instructional videos. This I share with my campus colleagues as well as other teachers across the globe. Specifically, this year, as I taught using my iPad, wirelessly projecting the information to my whiteboard, I screencasted and recorded each lesson. These lessons, then, were uploaded to the World Wide Web, with free access to all. Not only were these videos especially useful for my own students, but I also received numerous emails from other students and teachers who were accessing my resources. One group of these students had a teacher on maternity leave, so I, in essence, became their instructor. Another teacher was in her first year teaching AP Calculus, and my website became an integral part of her own preparation and planning. I also helped several teachers set up their own classrooms to be able to screencast and post their own lessons.

With the responsibility of teaching math at the highest high school level, it is also my personal desire and professional obligation to stay current in the latest trends in mathematics education. In my capacity as an AP reader for College Board, I have learned a great wealth of knowledge and experience, information and insight that I then share with my campus colleagues, especially those teaching the prerequisite courses. As my colleagues learn of the latest curriculum emphasis, instructional methods, and mathematical vernacular, we as a department are better able to vertically align the curriculum to the benefit of our students.

My effusive enthusiasm, school pride, youthful personality, sense of humor, and willingness to learn new things and take on difficult tasks invariably rubs off on my students and colleagues in a good way and acts as a sort of an effective elixir against the demoralization, frustration, and negativity that sometimes emerges. On campus and in the community, I am treated like a professional whose opinions and efforts are respected. In this regard, I feel blessed, privileged, and even a bit spoiled, but with this respect comes additional responsibility, a responsibility not only to continue doing the things that have earned me my reputation, but to advance it as well.

For future educators, by being an unrelenting, enthusiastic, caring, and knowledgeable example of a scholar-teacher, I hope to inspire a new generation of quality educators, who can then do the same for additional generations. After all, I'm in this profession because of the effects that many great teachers had on me. These were well-respected,

decorated, veteran teachers with great personalities who are still with me today, not so much for the content they taught me, but for who they were, something which cannot be measured on a standardized test.

However, the standard of the profession must be something to which we are accountable. While the role of state student assessment has taken on a negative connotation lately due to the scores-driven and punitive nature of some current accountability systems, it is an absolutely essential and critical part of the education equation. Teachers and schools need to be accountable to the data, to evaluation, and to our common vision and mission, and we cannot fall into the trap of discounting it for all of its apparent faults. Without assessment, one can live under the illusion that students understand the material without the proof that they are, running the risk that they are being passed on without having the requisite knowledge and skills—a grievous disservice to everyone involved. However, testing knowledge and skills isn't the only thing. Just like a baseball player's batting average doesn't entirely define who he is as a professional, neither can we use test data alone to judge teachers. Classroom environments that encourage creativity, dynamic thinking, and problem solving are important pieces in the assessment puzzle. In my math classes, tests and exams are a key part of the work my students do. My tests include novel problems that require analysis and thinking through logically and rationally. Current state assessment do not test on this level, and so there is an opportunity to develop more substantial, meaningful assessments that test the full range of student performance.

In addition to formal assessment, we need to be accountable to all stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, and the public amongst others. I believe the best accountability comes from a strong and supportive environment, where colleagues and administrators help teachers learn, reflect, and grow through a system of ongoing professional development and education. Secondary school departments that meet regularly, as mine does, to collaborate and problem-solve can provide support and a growth tool to teachers that is invaluable. Trusted professional relationships that provide mentoring and helpful feedback and observations can allow teachers to experiment and thrive in an atmosphere that is non-threatening, allowing them to grow and learn. This type of supportive accountability, I believe, is the best way to ensure that teachers are living up to the demands of the profession and meeting the high expectations we should have of each and every teacher. In addition to peers, students and parents should also have a role in teacher evaluation. When all stakeholders have a voice in establishing the shared vision and mission of a school, a district, or perhaps even the entire educational system, then the basis of accountability for teachers can be based on these shared objectives and goals.

## VIII. State Teacher of the Year

With the current national discussion around education immersed in the drumbeat of negativity, it is refreshing to be able to put a positive, human face on the collective efforts involved in teaching our nation's children. While public education is an enormous bureaucracy with a work force in the millions, its ultimate successes or failures rests in the hands of individuals. By focusing on these individuals who collectively work towards a common cause, I believe much of the animosity, acrimony, and misunderstanding directed toward our educational system can be eliminated.

We teachers are easy targets for education's failures, but we can't allow ourselves to become the national scapegoats for the problems of the educational system as a whole. I believe the vast majority of us educators are professionals who care deeply about our students, are experts in our field, and aren't afraid of hard work, learning, or change. With the proper resources, appreciation, and support, we can solve many of the biggest problems we face. Rather than focus on what's "wrong" with education and who might be to blame for it, we need to focus on what is right, and good, and positive about our schools and the hope and potential that currently resides within them. We need to refocus our attention on our mission and ultimate responsibility—our children. We must guide the national conversation, anchoring them in this common goal. We must unite behind our passionate foot soldiers in the classroom, and empower them with a collective, professional voice that can be heard on all levels. We must trust that we, the seasoned education professionals, know which classroom practices work and how students are motivated to reach their full potential. We must demand the autonomy to make decisions and the consignment to a meaningful role in directing the policies and influencing the legislation that guides education in the future.

While the most important work we do for our students takes place within the walls of our classroom, we must become more active outside of those walls to make our instruction more effective and powerful. We must begin to step out of our box, out of our comfort zone. Whether it is being an ambassador for teachers on a national level, or simply making yourself available for students outside normal hours, vesting yourself in the totality of the experience gives you more fulfillment as a teacher and more credibility among your students and community.

My message, then, is one of hope and empowerment. We have the human capital to give our students the education they deserve, and we have the energetic, optimistic youth ready to learn, given the right expectations, expertise, and support. We can derive our energy in the belief of the magnitude and importance of our vocations. We can find strength in the hope for tomorrow. As Thoreau so eloquently stated, "we must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aid, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn." Our expectations, then, become both a source of our languor and, more importantly, a source of our vitality.