



**WAKE COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**

# **Teacher of the Year ePortfolio**

**2018-2019**

**Craig J. Cerveney**

**(Name)**

**Douglas Elementary**

**(School)**

**Cross Categorical Kindergarten**

**(Grade/Subject)**



**TEACHER OF THE YEAR  
INFORMATION FORM**

**Section I  
(Form must be typed)**

Region: North Central Region

LEA Name: Wake County Public School System

Nominee Name: Craig J. Cerveney

(As it should appear on the plaque. 2 names max)

E-mail: Ccerveney@wcpss.net

Home Address: 7128 Kinross Dr

Raleigh NC 27613 ( 252 ) 341-3754  
City State Zip Code Telephone

Name of School: Douglas Creative Arts & Science Magnet Elementary School

School Address: 600 Ortega Dr

Raleigh NC 27613 ( 919 ) 881-4894  
City State Zip Code Telephone

Name of Principal: Derek Burns

School Profile (check one): X Urban                      Suburban                      Rural


What track if teaching in a non-traditional school? Traditional school

Number of Students in Nominee's School: 718

Teaching Assignment: Grade(s): CCK Subject Area (s): All Kindergarten subjects

Years in Present Position: 5 Total Years of Teaching Experience: 11

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Signature of Candidate  Date 1/11/18

## **Teacher of the Year ePortfolio Requirements**

### **Section I.** Information Form

### **Section II. Educational History and Professional Development Activities (Use a 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, and limit your response to two pages.)**

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

### **Section III. Professional Biography (Use a 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, and limit your response to two pages.)**

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

### **Section IV. Community Involvement (Use a 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, and limit your response to one page.)**

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

### **Section V. Philosophy of Teaching (Use a 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, and limit your response to two pages.)**

- A. Describe your personal beliefs and feelings 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?

### **Section VI. Educational Issues and Trends (Use a 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, and limit your response to two pages.)**

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

**Section VII. The Teaching Profession (Use a 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, and limit your response to two pages.)**

- A. What can you do to strengthen and improve the teaching profession?
- B. What is and/or should be the basis for accountability in the teaching profession?

**Section VIII. Wake County Public School System's Teacher of the Year (Use a 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, and limit your response to one page.)**

As the Wake County Public School System's Teacher of the Year, you would serve as a spokesperson and representative for the teaching profession. How would you communicate to your profession and to the general public the importance of education to our society? As the Wake County Public School System's Teacher of the Year, what would be your message?

**Section IX. Letters of Recommendation (Limit of three letters) (see attached sample)**

Include three letters of recommendation from among the following:

Superintendent, principal, administrator, colleague, student/former student, parent, or civic leader. (Letter of Recommendation requirements are indicated on the sample page enclosed.)—Make sure your letters of recommendation are signed before submitting.

## **Section II. Educational History and Professional Development Activities**

### **A. Education**

- East Carolina University, Greenville, NC- Bachelor of Science in Special Education, 2004. North Carolina Teaching License and Certified in Learning Disabilities.

### **B. Teaching employment history**

Douglas Art and Science Magnet Elementary School- Raleigh, NC

August 12- Present

*CCK-Teacher*

- Developed multi-sensory lessons to engage student learning and understanding of concepts.
- Improved lessons in order to integrate the curriculum and the Arts
- Created and utilized behavioral management plans.
- Facilitated IEP meetings. Created and implemented IEP goals and objectives K-5.

Douglas Art and Science Magnet Elementary School- Raleigh, NC

April 06- June 12

*CCR-Teacher K-5*

- Reading, Writing, Math, Behavior, and Social skills
  - Implemented Reading Mastery, Explode the code, Primary Beginnings, Great Leaps, as well as other reading strategies. Collected data using Running Records, PAST, Sight word Caterpillar and CORE reading assessments

### **C. Professional association memberships and Activities**

- ❖ (2017 – Present) A+ Fellow – A+ Fellows Are professional development consultants. Professionals who conduct professional development for A+ schools and partner organizations. They are leaders in the arts and education.

## **Section II. Educational History and Professional Development Activities**

- ❖ (2016-2017) Math Committee Chair – is responsible for running Math committee meetings and organizing math night. Math committee is responsible for informing staff of math best practices. The team analyses grade level data and discusses areas of concern throughout and between grade levels in order to target problematic areas and trends.
- ❖ (2008-2017) Response To Intervention (RTI) member – A problem solving team that created intervention plans for at promise students who have the most intense and serious problems. We looked at data, analyzed it and created interventions to target areas of most concern and that indicated lack of progress.
- ❖ **Staff development leadership activities and training of future teachers.**
  - (2012-13) Cooperating teacher for two interns, Meredith College and William Peace University
  - (2014-15) Cooperating teacher for two interns Meredith College and East Carolina University
  - (2016) Cooperating teacher for one intern, Meredith College
- ❖ **Awards and recognition**
  - (2011) National Board Certification in Early Childhood through Young Adulthood/Exceptional Needs Specialist, Specialty Area in Mild/Moderate Disabilities (ages 5-21+)

### **Section III. Professional Biography**

How I got to where I am today was a long journey. In first grade I was diagnosed with Developmental Delay, which soon after was diagnosed with Dyslexia, a Specific Learning Disability. I looked and acted like a typical 1<sup>st</sup> grade boy, but I had an extreme difficulty with reading and writing, math was my thing. My parents fought hard for me (in IEP meetings) so that I could stay and be included in our neighborhood school and not bussed to a “special” school. My mom was savvy enough at the time to have recorded the IEP meeting. She saw the potential in me that the teachers may have overlooked and I have tapes to prove it. These are the first memories of my educational career: struggles, tears, low expectations, and teachers stating “Craig can’t do this, this and this.” This is the beginning of my special education (from the student’s perspective) with an IEP including accommodations. By 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I was able to recognize most of my letters and sounds and knew some sight words, but could hardly write a recognizable sentence and couldn’t spell for the life of me. My parents decided to hire a tutor, who would tutor me once or twice a week after school and during the summer until I graduated high school.

Fast forward a few years to high school. I was still struggling academically and still below grade level in reading and writing. My parents, teachers, and tutor shared a common concern, my lack of focus and concentration. I was soon after diagnosed with ADHD and started taking medication for my attention difficulties. Something amazing happened in my 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> grade that has never happened to me before this point in my entire educational career, I made honor role. This is when I realized that anything is possible, as long as I work towards my goals.

In college is where I found myself wanting to help others. I started tutoring struggling students in Fundamentals of Mathematics. This is where I recognized some of my raw teaching skills. I had a knack for identifying students’ academic strengths and a different perspective on

### **Section III. Professional Biography**

how to manage their weaknesses. This realization led me to switch majors and begin my journey of becoming a Special Education Teacher.

Now I am a CCK Teacher and it is by far my greatest achievement. A CCK classroom is a self-contained special education classroom, it is known as the diagnostic year by other special educators. Every student in my classroom has an IEP (Individual Education Plan) and has been diagnosed with a disability. I have a wide range of students with disabilities that I serve. They are as follows: DD-Developmental Delay, AU-Autism/Asperger spectrum disorder, TBI-Traumatic Brain Injured, ED-Emotional/Behavior Disorder, and OHI-Other Health Impaired.

I have the privilege of serving kindergarteners with unique learning abilities and preparing them for mainstreaming into a regular classroom. My job is to teach the curriculum, cover each child's IEP and to collect data on everything. I have to collect a lot of data and analyze it to help decide each child's placement for the following school year. Basically I am leading the determination of my students going to a regular education or another self-contained classroom based on data I collect, analyze and present to the IEP team. My goal has always been to have 100% of my class going into a regular education setting when exiting my class. I accomplished this goal for the first time in 2016-2017. I hope to accomplish this again this year and every year after.

I have a different perspective on learning and teaching and this is why I became a special education teacher. I teach to serve students that many educators have difficulty teaching, the students who have unique learning styles, who have a disability. Teaching these students is a passion of mine because I, myself have a disability. I decided to become a teacher to pay it forward by being the best teacher I can be and to make each student see their own potential.



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

I pride myself on communication. I try my best to communicate effectively with my students, peers and parents. Parents or the parents' of my students are the gate way to my students' success. Like other teachers I have conferences them, but I also request home visits as well. A lot of insight and knowledge can be gained from visiting a students' home. Furthermore, I arrange and participate in play dates, allowing parents to get to know each other as well as their child's teacher. I aim to build trust from these relationships. I let all families know that I have their child's best interest in mind and communicate that we will work together to reach a common goal.

This year I finally started a parent support group called "Discover your child's Potential" as a way to reach out to parents who and offer behavior support for the home. I've been trying to start this support group for a few years, and was finally able to do so with the help of the school psychologist and guidance counselor. The parenting group meets once a month after school. Our first session in November went very well. We worked through some different behavior scenarios, shared our experiences, and learned some new behavioral strategies. We talked about how our behavior impacts the behavior and expectations of our children. From appearing in control and not engaging in arguments with children, we began to learn effective strategies in regards to parenting and dealing with behavioral problems. The strategies we covered included how to appear in control without appearing aggressive and how to disconnect and avoid getting into arguments with your child. Disconnecting involves stating your expectations and not asking why or getting into a back and forth debate. Together, we worked through some behavioral scenarios and provided each other with some suggestions. We are planning to meet in January and are inviting more parents throughout the school to come and participate.

## **Section V.     Philosophy of Teaching**

### **A.     Teaching Beliefs**

I believe my job as a teacher is to prepare all students for the road ahead and to show them how much fun learning is and how to overcome failure and obstacles in their way. Making a connection with each child is important. That connection creates and builds our relationship. I believe all relationships are built on mutual expectations and responsibilities. Through our relationship we set expectations and become responsible for trying our best to meet each other's expectations. I enjoy building relationships, but it is the results of the relationship that I enjoy most.

Like all teachers I love the "goose bump" moment. It is the moment that you and your student realize you are working together to overcome challenges and it results in success. Its effect on me is goose bumps. It comes in all different forms. It could be a student counting to 10 for the first time or being able to recognize their own name in writing. I basically work for goose bumps instead of money because the realization of all the struggles that you and your student have together gets erased in that moment. That is why I am so passionate about my students demonstrating grit or "Never give up mentality." You can achieve success by learning from your mistakes and never giving up.

I engage and challenge students through differentiated instruction. As a special education teacher, I believe that all children can be successful. Teaching with creativity and purpose is one of my strengths. I have PLTs and grade level meetings with colleagues to bring my expertise of differentiated instruction (purpose) to our school community. I take thousands of pictures and movies of my students working, learning and having fun. I share all of this almost instantly with the use of technology, to communicate and engage parents and peers.

## Section V. Philosophy of Teaching

### B. *Personal teaching style*

I love teaching using the Arts. Showing a student how to retell a story using dance or teaching sight word songs to remember sight words is a passion of mine. Introducing and using Multiple Intelligences as well as identifying which ones are strengths and which ones are weaknesses is very helpful to the educator and the student. I love to integrate technology, art, music, and dance into all of my lessons. Creating a curriculum that allows students to experience learning through Art, Music, Dance and Drama, makes a child's learning fun. I value assessments and the information they provide. Assessments can be enjoyable but have to be purposeful. A test is necessary for data collection in order to show others that you are not just having fun all day, but that your students are making progress towards their goals and objective that are in place. I believe that it's okay to fail or to make mistakes, it is probably the most important lessons I teach. It is all about learning from those mistakes and creating a solution from past failures. FAIL stands for **First Attempt In Learning**. Eventually mistakes will diminish with more and more success accomplished.

I preach and live an "I can" attitude to my students, in my classroom and in my school. I believe in an "I can" attitude. "I can't" is not allowed in my classroom. You can say it's hard, difficult or I need help, but saying "I can't" is prohibited. I have sat in parent/teacher conferences and have had to stop parents from saying my child "can't" do that. After many engaging school days, lessons, and engaging activities, parents return with amazement of their child's progress. This is why I teach, to change mind sets. Kids learn in all different ways, I understand this and look for each of my student's strengths. I focus my lessons on a student's strengths and teach them how to overcome and manage their weaknesses.

## **Section VI. Educational Issues and Trends**

A major issue in education today is the lack of education (comprehension, understanding and realization) of a teacher's role as a profession and the stress that it entails. This one factor is discouraging good teachers from becoming a great teachers and causing teachers to leave the profession as well as preventing future teachers from going into the teaching profession. As a teacher I feel that we are devalued and often used as pawns that are held accountable for things that we may perceive to be are out of our control.

Teachers are trained and certified as well as monitored through observations and standardized test scores. They also need to renew their license and take professional development in order to retain and maintain their career as a teacher. We are professionals and are under the microscope. We are feeling the unbearable pressure of being a teacher and held accountable for many factors that we do not have direct control of. As all my past interns will tell you, licensure cannot prepare you for the emotional roller coaster of teaching with an open heart. Teachers are the highlight of many children's day. I make sure my students are not hungry and have had enough sleep, as well as properly/cleaned clothed for the day. I want to be the light in the darkness for all students who live in poverty.

Law makers and government agencies seemed to want to dictate what to teach and how the money is spent in a public school but write checks to for-profit and non-profit charter school agencies with no strings attached. Making education a business scares me. Money does not solve everything, in many cases money helps but in most cases money corrupts the problem. The powers that be, need to know that teaching is not as easy as we make it look. Education is not a business, we do not choose our resources (students) they choose us because we see potential, not dollar signs.

## **Section VI. Educational Issues and Trends**

So how did we get to this dilemma of lack of resources for those who need it and profiting for those who see education as a money game? The simple answer is technological society advanced along with the way we produce products (we import more now than ever before) but the way we educate our young did not change so much. We are just now thinking of ways to change the educational system but we are still constrained by standardized tests and thinking of curriculum by grade levels.

Standardized test are still standardized and do not measure creativity and perseverance. They address memorization and not critical thinking. In order to address changes to make our educational system better we need to stop trying to make students fit into some categorical construct that has a loose projection of their own future. I am data collection analyst kind of guy/teacher, I do think standardized testing has a place in education, but right now it seems to be a hammer in a tool box but we need a screwdriver, if you know what I mean.

As a CCK teacher I often ask myself is this curriculum developmentally appropriate? The answer is NO. If a child doesn't know which hand is their dominant hand, why should I expect them to be curriculum standard appropriate or on grade level, for something that has not yet been developed. Children learn differently and at different paces, but yet we grade them on a criteria that could expand a 12 month developmental period.

My solution to all the as aforementioned issues in education is to get rid of the fixed mindset curriculum and propose an open mindset curriculum. It is a little radical but yet quite "nearly" at the same time. Students learn and advance at their own developmental pace, much like how a martial arts student advances in rank (belt) in a dojo. This is not something that will happen overnight but with good leadership and an "I CAN" attitude, steps in the right direction is progress for our future creative and critical thinking productive citizens.

## **Section VII. The Teaching Profession**

### *Strengthen the teaching profession and being held accountable*

I have had the privilege of being an A+ Fellow (professional development consultant) which allows me to train others and train with other teachers in A+ schools throughout the state and beyond. This gives me a good insight of how schools are run within and out of the state. My conclusion from my experiences leads me to many factors that may contribute to the lack of progress in student achievement, test scores, or our interpretation of achievement. I believe the cause of many school problems boils down to, stress. It may appear in many different ways, but stress is the constant in the educational equation. How do we diminish this in our schools?

To strengthen and improve the teaching profession we need to de-stress everyone, administrators, teachers, parents and students. I think good leadership and communication from administrators can help alleviate the stress teachers feel. Teachers may feel undervalued or underappreciated. Some teachers may feel that they do not have the freedom of teaching how they want to, and may get mixed messages from administration. These are all examples of fixed mindsets caused by tension, lack of effective communication and misreading/understanding of one's role in the educational community. Proper administrative professional development paired with staff training will help communicate the big picture to the entire staff.

A teacher's responsibility as a professional should center on reflecting or reevaluating oneself as a teacher. Regular self-reflection will enable a teacher to improve on their own methods and strategies for teaching. Being able to honestly look at your practices and adapting your teachings is essential in becoming a great teacher. Setting goals and monitoring your own progress paired with self-evaluation will reflect in the classroom.

Parents' play a big role in a school's success. Some parents are active PTA members and others may not even know that the school has a PTA. Getting schools to create more outreach to

## **Section VII. The Teaching Profession**

their communities will greatly benefit everyone in the school. The problem is the resources, time and money. Being able to offer schools more resources as well as professional development and requiring them to make effective outreach efforts might improve progress toward schools achieving their goals.

A student should not be stressed in school. Anxiety should have no place in a learning environment. We should focus on learning from our mistakes with an open mind set. We need to reduce testing and improve critical thinking skill in our schools. Having students have more control of their own learning will help students establish essential critical thinking skills for their future. Setting goals for yourself and students as well as tracking the progress is a great accountability tool to build a successful classroom. I believe in letting my students set personal academic goals (with guidance for my 5 yr olds), is a great way to hold them accountable for their own progress. Teaching them how to reflect and think critically about their own learning is important. We post our goals on the wall and each week we see if we met our goal or readjust our strategies to meet our goals.

I have an open mind set and have been fortunate to have had good communication with my administration and even attended professional development along side with them. Most teachers have not had the same opportunity. A+ professional development is a good resource for schools and helps staff identify challenge throughout the school. I believe the A+ essentials should be adopted by all schools to show each schools strengths and weaknesses, similar to MTSS but using arts and involving all staff in PD. After this is established schools can effectively evaluate themselves and indicate their problems and prioritize their solutions.

## **Section VIII. Wake County Public School System's Teacher of the Year**

I have come to the conclusion that I may not be every student's best or perfect teacher, but that's what I strive for, and that is what every teacher should strive for. We have to believe that all students who go through our classrooms will be successful. These students must never give up and always pick themselves up when they fall. Each failure, brings a better understanding on how to reach success, in and outside the classroom. We need to continue to collect and analyze data to improve our methods of teaching. Take time to reflect on lessons, student engagement and communication with each student and parent. Look for feedback in all places. Do everything within your ability to improve your craft and create student growth.

My message to the general public, education is important in our society. My message is that education is power and levels all playing fields. We need to continue to invest in our children's future so that they can persevere through our failures. Our educational system is transforming. It is changing for the better. Change can be scary but is necessary for the growth in our society. Educators are constantly adapting their way of teaching to create a better tomorrow for everyone. We need everyone's support and encouragement to help children succeed and exceed expectations.

My final message to educational professionals is, to persevere through difficult times. Teachers do not set limitations on yourself or any child you meet. Limits are barriers that YOU choose not to break or overcome. I believe that the start of students' success is determined by the success of each of our classrooms. The academic lessons we teach in our classrooms each day are just a part of what we do as teachers. It is our ability to connect to each student and overcome our individual obstacles and to teach them how to work through theirs. Remember it is not "what" we teach but it is "HOW" we teach, that will change our students' lives.



To Whom It May Concern,

When considering the qualities of a powerful educator, Craig Cerveny embodies them all. First and foremost, with a deep understanding of the students he teaches, he does everything in his power to help those students grow. He values the exceptionalities of each individual child while challenging them to reach their full potential. He treats every child with respect, kindness, and dignity to establish the trust that is vital for developing a relationship. He intentionally devotes himself to nurturing an individual bond with each student. He does not just teach math, literacy, and science. He understands that in order for a student to reach their potential, he must support their mental and emotional health as well. With a relationship rooted in understanding and trust, Mr. Cerveny drives the development of his students. He exhausts every possible strategy and resource and then tries more. Using music, household items, or unconventional games, not limited by school hours or supplies, he creates his own strategy to help a student with a particular skill. He uses his wit, creativity and powerful drive to always do what's best for his students and he never gives up. His time, effort, and energy to impact the lives of his students knows no bounds.

An effective educator possesses a desire to always keep improving their practice through self-reflection. As his over analytical intern, I had a fear of failure which was quickly thwarted by Mr. Cerveny. On multiple occasions, I woke up to a music video made by Mr. Cerveny, using a song he'd heard on the ride home the day before. The videos encouraged me to reflect on ways to improve, pick myself up, and try again. This demonstrating exactly how an amazing teacher always strives to be better and never gives up. Each day, he came in with a new and different strategy to try. It might be using tap lights for phoneme segmentation, a remix of a popular song to help a student learn their name, or spontaneously writing numbers on his hand to help a child count. Strategies like these are not taught in teaching courses or written in textbooks. They come from a teacher who is driven by an innate desire to do whatever it takes to meet their students' needs and keep pushing them. That desire comes through reflection of his practice. Self-reflection promotes the same growth in you as a teacher as the growth you try to foster in your students and Mr. Cerveny does just that.

Mr. Cerveny makes his school a better place just by being himself. His positive attitude and sense of humor are unmatched. He spreads his positivity with a smile, a corny joke and an open-door policy. His classroom is a safe place where teachers can come ask for help since his ideas and resources are endless or just come to talk to a selfless listener. He will stop what he's doing to answer a question, find a resource, or offer an idea on the spot. You will often find other teachers in his classroom, just there to soak up the energy or maybe get an idea of how to handle a situation. Students, some his former students and others not, can also be found in his classroom to say hello, ask for help, or just seek refuge from a hard day.

Mr. Cerveny uses his experience, knowledge, and sense of humor to benefit the education system in our community. As our region grows and our schools become increasingly diverse, he is an expert on meeting the distinct needs of students. As a new teacher, I have frequently called upon Mr. Cerveny for ideas and strategies for my own students. He willingly offers suggestions. Inadvertently, his expertise is spread throughout other classrooms. Mr. Cerveny's desire to meet students' specific needs and readiness to share expertise with other educators exhibits that Mr. Cerveny is a crucial component in impacting local education policies and programs.

Sincerely,



Josie Hodge  
Cross-Categorical Kindergarten  
Green Hope Elementary

December 27, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

For the past six years, I have had the pleasure of working with Craig Cervený at Douglas Elementary, and I am absolutely thrilled that he was selected as our school's teacher of the year. Craig's passion and enthusiasm for teaching is infectious. Every day, he brings endless joy and laughter into the building. He is a relentless advocate for all students, a compassionate and outspoken school leader; and, an innovator who is always striving to bring out every member of our school community's personal best. Craig truly represents education at its finest!

First and foremost, Craig is a relationship builder. Craig works to personally connect with every member of our school community including colleagues, parents and staff. As a colleague, Craig recognizes that collaboration is the key to success. He is always willing to share his ideas during planning, PLT, Tier III and school improvement meetings. He is also a seeker of knowledge. He asks thought provoking questions and draws on the expertise of others in order to meet all of his students' academic and social needs. For parents, Craig is never unavailable. He is in constant communication with each of his students' families and works tirelessly to make them feel welcome. He invites his families into the classroom, facilitates parent workshops; and, shares student work constantly through text, e-mail and Twitter. Undoubtedly, he understands the tremendous value of the home-school connection. In regards to building relationships with students, Craig's abilities are unmatched. He attends games, recitals and birthday parties. He arranges to meet families at the parks and spends time learning about the interests of his students. Because Craig takes time to discover the unique interests and talents of his students, he is able to capitalize on their strengths and better facilitate their learning. Cultivating relationships is one of Craig's great gifts and one of many reasons as to why he is a successful educator.

Craig is also known at Douglas Elementary for being a creative genius. He is always researching and discovering innovative ways to engage his students in meaningful learning. He seamlessly incorporates technology and promotes collaborative learning that is applicable to the real world. Craig articulates the why behind their work and makes learning relevant to his students' lives. In addition, Craig constantly incorporates the multiple intelligences into his instruction. He uses art, music, dance, language and visual models daily in his teaching in order to ensure that he is addressing all of the learning styles in his classroom. Craig's creative and innovative teaching style engages all students, and his delivery of instruction creates an environment that allows every student to meet his high expectations.

Craig Cervený truly is the epitome of excellence in education. He challenges everyone to strive for greatness and inspires all of those around him to never settle for less than his or her best. It is a true honor and privilege to know and work alongside Craig. His positive impact at Douglas Elementary is vast. We are undoubtedly a stronger school because of his presence.

Sincerely,



Sarah Bruner  
Douglas Elementary  
Instructional Resource Teacher  
[sbruner@wcpss.net](mailto:sbruner@wcpss.net)

January 3, 2018

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to support and recommend Craig Cervený as Wake County Public School System 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year. I have known Craig as a colleague since 2007, when I took on the position of Magnet Coordinator at Douglas Creative Arts and Science Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, NC. Later, Craig became an A+ Fellow (professional development consultant) for A+ Schools of North Carolina, the program I direct at the NC Arts Council. Craig became an A+ Apprentice Fellow in the Spring of 2016 and now as a full Fellow, he helps to train teachers and support schools in building creative capacity and culture. Craig is a creative, motivated and collaborative life-long learner who would be an excellent representative as Teacher of the Year.

As an A+ Fellow, Craig provides guidance as our network of A+ Schools transforms their schools through the use of the arts (<http://aplus-schools.ncdcr.gov>). As a workshop facilitator and team member for A+, he designs and presents workshops, assesses school needs and collaborates with his colleagues to provide effective training and development. A particular skill of Craig's is providing all educators with ideas and strategies for working with their special needs students, and for building creative and engaging classrooms that support the growth and development of these special students.

Most importantly, Craig is a creative and effective teacher for the most challenging of students. He provides rigorous and engaging experiences for his students, helping them to navigate school and make connections across school time and non-school time. He provides both compassion and rigor in working with his students, nurturing their skills and personalities and maintaining a cutting edge, humor-filled and engaging classroom. Craig's students, and their families, love him and his classroom is a model of engaging, exciting and relevant learning. This is doubly amazing due to the nature of the needs of his small students.

Craig makes a difference in the life of special needs students every day. It's time he was recognized for the very special educator that he is and for the impact he has not only on these students' daily lives but on the policy and practice that surrounds special needs education. He goes the extra mile for his students and would be an outstanding role model and spokesperson for Wake County Schools as the 2018-19 Educator of the Year.

Sincerely,

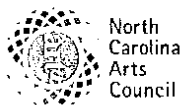


**Michelle Mazan Burrows**

**Director of A+ Schools | North Carolina Arts Council**

a. 4632 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4632

t. 919.807.6503 | c. 919.618.6175 | w. [aplus-schools.ncdcr.gov](http://aplus-schools.ncdcr.gov)



North  
Carolina  
Arts  
Council

A+ Schools of North Carolina is a program of the N.C. Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Lisa Jolley  
P.O. Box 5352  
Raleigh, NC 27650  
917.865.0559  
lisa.jolley@gmail.com  
January 8, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

“Special Education.” Let’s be honest; those are words no parent wants to hear. When told your child will need to be in Special Education classes, you experience several emotions: on one hand, you’re grateful your child will be getting the help and support they need, with a teacher who is (hopefully) qualified to work with their specific challenges, but on the other hand, you worry; you have to adjust your expectations for your child’s school success, both academically and socially. “Will they fit in? Will they be accepted by their typical peers? Will expectations of them be lowered simply because they have a special need?” Genuine concerns, all.

As a parent of a special-needs student, I know these concerns well. My son, George Yionoulis, is a fourth-grader at Douglas Elementary, in a mainstream classroom. He also has autism. When George started kindergarten at Douglas, he was in Craig Cerveny’s special-education class. Mr. Cerveny teaches CCK, or, “cross-categorical” kindergarten. Students in CCK classes run the gamut of special needs; autism, cerebral palsy, hearing/vision impairment, the list goes on. It takes a special kind of person to pursue special education, particularly CCK. Craig Cerveny is a special kind of person, which is why I am proudly recommending him for Teacher of the Year for Wake County Public School System.

Craig Cerveny made the choice to teach in the special education field which in itself is a rewarding, unselfish, and compassionate, not to mention challenging career. But Mr. Cerveny goes beyond his teaching obligations, which are already extensive. His commitment to his students and their parents is genuine, with total devotion to giving his students whatever instruction and support is needed for them to hold their own with their typical peers. His energy seems to know no bounds, and his enthusiasm is contagious. I will never forget getting a message from him in the middle of the day, informing me that George actually ate lunch in the cafeteria with the rest of the kindergarten classes. It was a huge accomplishment; one that parents of typical children rightfully take for granted. For us, it was the first step toward inclusion, and Mr. Cerveny was as excited, if not more, than we were. He is invested. A few weeks later, another message: George had spent half his day in a typical kindergarten classroom and fit in wonderfully. As much as he loved teaching George, he was preparing him to enter the typical classroom, where he has been thriving since first grade.

George is currently a member of the chorus, has performed two years running in the Douglas Variety Show, appears on the morning announcements, and has twice won his grade-level spelling bee. He has no behavior issues, gets high grades and loves school.

Craig Cerveny sees ultimate possibility and potential for success in every one of his students, and instills in them the confidence and motivation to try their best every day. His expectations are high; sometimes higher than those of the parents, and he does not give up. No matter how long it takes a student to achieve something a typical child can do easily, the man does not give up.

Craig Cerveny represents the best kind of teacher; the kind who sees the best in his students despite their differences. He runs toward every challenge with the most positive attitude and boundless energy, and becomes not only a teacher, but a part of his students’ lives. He “shows up.” One example of this came when George had a great fear of automatic hand dryers in public restrooms. Mr. Cerveny took a Sunday to take George (with his two young kids and my husband in tow) to Toys R’ Us where they would work to overcome his fear. It was a group effort, and George was equally

excited and scared, but it ended up being a great success. Mr. Cerveny (and all of us) gets back as much as he puts in.

How does he help promote the teaching profession? In just a few short years, Craig Cerveny has made a powerful name for himself among the Wake County special needs community. Parents want their kids in his class; teachers regularly observe him and seek him out for advice. We are so lucky to have him at Douglas.

Inclusion is so important. When children of different learning abilities are placed together, everyone wins; the students with special needs get to model their typical peers, who in turn see classmates. Not “different classmates,” not “special needs” or “disabilities,” but simply, fellow classmates. They have the opportunity to learn first-hand that we are all unique, and we all have strengths and weaknesses. Inclusion helps all students learn from each other. George made a video for his fourth grade class last month (December, 2017), describing for his classmates what autism is like for him. It has gone viral, attracting the attention of news outlets around the world. We have gotten the most uplifting messages from parents, teachers, and kids, and the video has been shown in many classrooms, globally.

I can honestly say this never would have happened without George having had Craig Cerveny as a teacher, and a lifelong influence. I hope you’ll seriously consider this recommendation.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Jolley', with a stylized, flowing script.

Lisa Jolley