Good morning and welcome to convocation! I am delighted, excited, and humbled to be this year’s choice for Torrington Public School’s Teacher of the Year. Our Essential Question for this talk is: “What are the qualities of a great educator?” Many of my colleagues are more intelligent, more experienced, more organized, more creative, and more humorous than I, so why am I here? That is a rhetorical question-no response is required, please.

I remember when I was a new teacher here in Torrington, sitting at convocation. At first I just wanted the speeches to end because I had things I needed to do, but as I listened, I learned stuff and was inspired. I don’t know if I will be able to teach you or arouse optimism, motivation and promise for the new school year, but I certainly hope that you will listen while I share why I believe Torrington Middle School, and Torrington Public School educators are so great. I use the word “educator” and not “teacher”, because I mean to include **all** the adults who work with our students every day-our cafeteria staff, our custodians, our nurses, our paras, our secretaries, our bus drivers, the parents, our administrators, our board of education members **and** our teachers. We are all educators, one way or another, of Torrington’s children.

This is the first year that I remember when the teacher of the year has come from the middle school. I sometimes feel as if we at the middle school are almost like the middle child. We’ve got the cute little brother or sister that is elementary school and the older, smarter sibling that is the high school and where do we fit in? We’re not so cute and we’re not college bound. We are a seething mass of hormonal changes that you can see, hear, and smell. We are that glorious insanity that bears witness to the depths of despair and heights euphoria-sometimes within the same day or within the same hour. Inevitably, the hormonal challenges can bring at times not only drama, but reckless and stupid behaviors. At the end of our first week of school last year, a colleague who was new to our building asked me when things settled down so we could catch our breath and I had to reply, honestly, that it doesn’t. “It is like this all year long. And the last few weeks of school are even tougher.” It is a crazy place to work (crazy in a good way) and I love it here.

We teach students at the most awkward and vulnerable stages of their lives as they search for their identities as individuals and their places in society. Our educators are not only experts in their primary jobs-be it teacher, nurse or any other position- but they also teach our students how to handle confrontation, bounce back from defeat, and see problems from all different perspectives. After teaching here eight years, I have my colleagues to thank for helping me retain my sanity and not allowing me to sink into the tempestuous waves of hormonal behaviors-though I can roll my eyes better than any twelve year old girl. It’s true-just ask my husband. We keep each other sane, we keep each other focused, we keep each other professional (at least in front of the students). If not for my fellow educators and teammates, I wouldn’t be here today as your representative for Teacher of the Year.

I believe that **all** Torrington educators, while maybe not quite as crazy (crazy in a good way) as those at the middle school, are great because so many of us go out of our way to reach and teach Torrington’s students. We put in extra hours both before and after school to meet with colleagues and parents. We coach sports, chaperone at dances, organize field trips, serve on committees, and attend workshops and classes. We make sure our students are not just versed in those standardized tests, but capable of problem solving, collaborating, and working with technology. We do all these things because they help us reach and teach our students. We demonstrate commitment, passion, and excellence and I am proud to be a Torrington educator.

Now, make a heart with your hands. (Demonstrate) I want you to remember that this heart is a symbol of Torrington educators. It represents many things, besides that I love you. It represents the compassion and caring of Torrington educators for their students. It represents the passion and desire that all Torrington educators have for excellence in education. And, it represents the strength and endurance we have exhibited, and continue to exhibit, to reach the high goals we set for ourselves and our students. Compassion, passion, and strength. Those are qualities that Torrington educators share. Don’t be afraid to let your compassion and caring for students show as you are patient and flexible. Don’t be afraid to let your desire for excellence in education show as you encourage your students to do better. Don’t be afraid to support your colleagues, administrators, and parents and share your strengths so we can all reach excellence in our schools.

As we start our new year, with all the many changes and challenges facing us, we need to keep in mind that we all-administrators, teachers, paras, nurses, custodians, secretaries, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, board of ed members and parents-are in the educating business together. Imagine what we can build by working together, all of us, sharing our strengths, our compassion, and our dreams and desires for Torrington Public Schools. Our hearts beating together will be heard across the state as leaders in school excellence. By working together, our community can help each and every Torrington student meet their goals and dreams.

Let’s return to our Essential Question, shall we? ““What are the qualities of a great educator?” They are the qualities that **you** demonstrate at work every day. I invite you, all my fellow Torrington educators, to join together this year, work through the inevitable problems and issues that will occur as we embark on our new administrative configuration with new colleagues, new families, and new students. We also have new administrators and I want you to think not “What can those new administrators do for me?” But “What can we do **together** for Torrington Public School?” Find your strength, your compassion, and your passion, and show our community Torrington Public School's true heart.

So, why **am** I here? I’m not even going to try to answer that. You know that there are teachers who are better read, more stylish, younger, and more energetic than I. No one of us possesses all the qualities of a great teacher-not even our former middle school teachers of the year- Dan, Dora, or Roseanne. Or this year’s nominees Sue, Jim, or Angelo. It takes all our talents together to make us great.

Some of our Torrington Public School students have prepared a musical selection for you. I want you to welcome Torrington Middle School Students Megan Barrios, Paige Cianciolo, Karissa Cooper, Morgan Rubino, and Audrey Todd, and former TMS student and Greater Hartford Academy for the Arts freshman, Connor Picard. This number was choreographer by former TMS student and current senior at OWTS Tori Nelson.

Thanks to you all, and especially to my drama students.

(7 minutes)