

Kyle O'Toole
K-1 Instructional Coach
Vogel-Wetmore Elementary School
Torrington District Teacher of The Year
TOY Speech

Thank you _____, and I extend a warm welcome to all of you to the Torrington district 2023-2024 Convocation

I stand before you with gratitude and a sense of honor, ready to extend a heartfelt welcome to our distinguished attendees:

- Mayor Elinor Carbone,
- Representative Jay Case
- Representative Michelle Cook
- Senator Lisa Seminara
- Esteemed Board Members,
- Superintendent Michael Wilson
- Assistant Superintendent Sue Fergusson,
- The Office of Teaching and Learning,
- Respected Torrington Public School Administrators, Dedicated teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff members.
- Family and Friends

To say that I am deeply privileged to be named Torrington Public Schools' Teacher of the Year would be an understatement. This title affords me the distinct privilege of representing a multitude of remarkably talented and impassioned educators within our district. As I glance across the room, familiar faces shine with the remarkable energy that you each bring to our vibrant community.

I can recall one of the first times I was ever in this cafetorium. I believe it was 2010-2011. It was for the Conscious Discipline / Dr. Becky Bailey Professional

Development. It was my first PD in the district and I was meeting many people for the first time. The training was focused on building positive relationships among students. Throughout the training, participants had to turn to partners and make individualized hand shakes, hugs, and highfives. Just meeting many of these people, I was so nervous and my hands were sweating profusely. This was definitely worse than my interview to get the job. I tried feverishly to dry my clammy hands to no avail. Today, I stand before you, hopeful for a calmer demeanor, although my palms haven't quite stopped sweating.

As we gather here today, I wish to extend a heartfelt welcome and my deepest gratitude to two exceptional individuals who have been pivotal in my journey:

My husband and partner of 15 years, George Mitesser. Without his unwavering support, my journey into the world of education would not have taken flight. Irrespective of the challenges I face at work, he remains my steadfast foundation. George, I share appreciation for your unending support, which continues to kindle my passion for teaching and learning. I love you.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my mother, Suzanne Muccino. She fostered an environment in which my siblings and I could thrive as unique individuals. My mother bravely raised her children on her own, and we were not easy children to manage! She also worked multiple jobs, continued her higher education, is now a social worker, and also has 5 grandchildren! Her encouragement has nurtured dreams within my siblings and me. Mom, you are not only my inspiration but also the very muse that guides me.

I grew up in Waterbury, CT, and attended the Waterbury Public School System, having been educated in Chase Elementary School, Wallace Middle School, and Crosby High School. Many of you won't be surprised to learn, I loved school from an early age and was normally the teacher's pet. I was lucky to have skilled educators every year, as Torrington students have with all of you. I learned early to help those in need, advocate for others, and that it takes a village for

children to thrive. A combination of biological family, chosen family, and school family is a team that needs to collaborate to support children's progress.

I was graced with a village of women in my family that supported me - my grandmother, Nanny, my mother, and my 4 sisters. The experiences and circumstances in which I was raised, and the women I was raised by, have shaped the open-minded and proactive educator I have become.

I have been a part of the Torrington Public Schools family since 2010. TPS has shaped the educator I am today through the relationships and mentorships I have had with so many of my peers. I have been a kindergarten and first-grade classroom teacher, third-grade distance learning teacher, K-5 math interventionist, bilingual kindergarten long-term substitute, and most recently, a K-3 instructional coach. A special shout out to all of the instructional coaches throughout our district.

Over the course of my career, I have been able to continuously support students, families, and teachers within my classroom, my school, and my district to build a synergetic learning community. In my current position as a K-3 instructional coach at Vogel Wetmore (WOO HOO), I am able to collaborate with educators within my building, and many across the district, to help excel the learning of all students. I am continually amazed at the talent and knowledge that exists within our district.

My educational philosophy is based on the principles of a student-centered approach to learning. Students' interests, needs, and overall well-being must be the top priority in our educational system. Educators must recognize that each student embodies a unique set of strengths and challenges. Students must develop 21st-century skills such as rigorous critical thinking skills, collaboration, communication skills, and ownership of their learning, which are all aligned with our district's portrait of a graduate.

I work diligently, as many of you do as well, to reach this goal and support my peers in doing the same. My goal for students is to take lessons and skills within the classroom and transfer them into their own lives - make their learning purposeful and significant to them. When working with young learners, the

bridge between home and school takes on paramount significance, empowering families to be active stakeholders within our educational community.

My teaching and educational career has been anchored in educating students, families, and teachers from all different backgrounds with a focus on equity and inclusion. My passion lies in advocating for students' educational and personal rights. Educators should embody an “all students can learn” attitude. Students can thrive when given the appropriate support.

Reflecting on my years of learning and teaching, I continually return to two key concepts that were always prevalent in my practice but have now become the pillars of my efforts as an educator and as a citizen: advocacy and allyship.

We must advocate for students of all cultures and backgrounds. Educational equity can be defined as all students are able to receive the support and resources they need to succeed. I like to deepen this definition by adding that meaningful cultural identities such as: gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and other demographics do not set limits on a student's level of success. These identities include a majority of students that have been marginalized such as English Language Learners, children of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQI+, and more. Many of these students are within our very schools and community. Sharing the understanding and urgency for educational equity with other educators is my goal as Torrington's Teacher of the Year.

As a community of educators, we must advocate for all of our students' rights within the classroom and our society. Educators, families, community members, and students must work alongside educational policymakers to ensure that communities in need are able to receive the support and resources to close any learning gap. Succeeding in education is not a privilege, rather, it is a right. Educational advocacy needs to be at the forefront of all educators' work.

Additionally, personal mental health is vital to being a strong and effective educator. For nine years, I have personally practiced yoga as well as trained to be a yoga instructor. The mental health skills I teach to students and adults alike are a powerful tool for supporting inclusion. In the spirit of one of my yoga classes, I want to offer you all a mantra for the new school year. I want us all to remember that “WE ARE A FAMILY”. A family across our classrooms. A family across our schools. A family across our district and community. So be kind. Be generous. Be supportive. Be loving. And advocate for one another. Build each other up!

We are all a part of a big gloriously diverse and unique family. And I learned early on in life the importance of a supportive family that advocates for one another.

My heart and soul are woven into the work I do with my students, their families, my fellow teachers, and staff. Advocacy and allyship define my existence as an educator and citizen of our society. I am determined to share my passion for fighting for all students' rights and ignite this flame in others. Our children deserve a bright future, and we, as educators, must advocate for them now.

Thank you again for this esteemed opportunity to be Torrington Public Schools' Teacher of the Year.

And happy new year!