



**Nominee: Christine Payne
Appoquinimink High School
Middletown, Delaware**

Nominator: Rachel Wagner

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

To many students at Appoquinimink High School, Christy Payne is more than just a school employee. Her roles vary from media specialist to tech support, from club advisor to personal mentor, from editor to inspiration. She has fought to keep literacy alive in a generation that in many cases shows resistance, and has enhanced school curriculum. This woman will do things simply because she cares about her students and their success. She has personally planned and run several events on the school, district and state level all for the sake of giving students access to resources they simply cannot gain in the classroom. Outside of her academic attempts to impact students, she plays a key role in school life and serves as a point of contact for many kids.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

This question actually makes me laugh because helping students at my high school is the definition of Christy Payne. I don't even know where to begin. Aside from her impact on groups in the classroom and her curriculum enhancement, she is a one-on-one assistant to all students. This includes sitting with them- for as long as it takes- and going over how to use Microsoft Word, how to cite sources, how to use databases. At our high school, the senior project includes a five page research paper. Ms. Payne is bombarded with questions throughout the year and is always there to calm students down (senior projects are stressful) and help set them on track.

In addition, Ms. Payne frequently serves as a hotline to kids. They run to the library to talk to her, because she is that adult in the building you just know you can trust. Her treatment for teenage heartache? Here's a book. Need to feel less alone? There's a book for that. She is able to listen to what is going on, and give us a lifeline- in the form of a novel.

On a personal level, Ms. Payne has had a huge impact on my abilities as a writer. Frequently I bring her a poem and just leave it on her desk- a little gift for her- just to

have her input. I've run for several leadership positions within the past four years, and she was always the person who looked at my speeches. I'd wait, tapping a pen against her desk, as she circled and jotted and then critiqued every word.

As a teenager, I've had my own struggles and issues. When facing something I couldn't come to terms with, I, as many teens my age do, turned to some form of release. That, for me, was writing.

I began writing the poems my sophomore year, and I'd bring them to Ms. Payne. It was a little secret between us, a shared connection. She'd read them over, tell me her thoughts, and then frequently tell me how it related to some novel, and I'd walk out of the library with books in my arms and a lighter weight on my heart.

The level of healing I have found through literature and the art of words has in many ways formed fundamental pieces of who I am.

3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific

Ms. Payne has been a librarian in elementary, middle and high schools for our district. In each school the library became the heart of the school. Activities flowed from the library; students and their families flowed in. Literature circles were not just for the students, there was an evening literature circle for the family. I remember bringing blankets and pillows to camp out on the floor of the library as we discussed the latest book we had all read. Students wanted to read so they could participate in the fun. Who does not want to wear their pajamas to school, sit in a rocking chair in the hall and read a good book to celebrate all of the books that had been read by the students? A hurricane wiped out libraries in the south and Ms. Payne organized drives and fund raisers to help replace their collections. As Ms. Payne moved up in school age the activities changed but the overall impact on the school community did not.

At the high school level in addition to being the librarian, Ms. Payne has brought a lot of new clubs and activities to the students. One, notably, is Book Club. We meet during lunches, and from my freshman year to now I've only seen it grow. We used to have a scattering of kids, now our largest lunch has over 35 participants. Book club serves as a way to promote student reading. We look at everything from the classics to hot-off-of-the-presses material.

My high school is new, early in building traditions and lacking many student activities often taken for granted. One thing we lacked was a Gay Straight Alliance. My sophomore year, this need was met. Ms. Payne, as the advisor, has opened up a safe space for many students. Our "Spectrum" (the name of the GSA) gives students opportunities to seek refuge in each other, other adults in the school, and guest speakers who Ms. Payne frequently brings in. We have had a large participation in many GSA events- including a leadership summit every year, and the Day of Silence. More importantly our high school has become an accepting environment where the students feel safe and valued. A great deal of that atmosphere emanates from the library where all are welcomed and encouraged to be themselves.

In addition to book club and GSA, Ms. Payne- truly a jack of all trades- also serves as the advisor of Paintball Club. All sorts of students head over to the range with her to speckle themselves in color, and throughout her time at AHS, Ms. Payne has roped many teachers into the interesting experience as well. Again this leads to diversity in the crowd of students that spend time in the library.

I can't really describe her as anything other than "accepting." This is what she has done most significantly for the school and library- created an environment built around acceptance. Literature inspires empathy and understanding, and in many ways, that is the embodiment of this woman. The library in some schools might be a dusty room full of classical literature that students are not drawn to- our library draws those students in. It is colorful, dribbled with posters of our teachers holding their favorite books. Seasonal decorations are ever prevalent, and there is always a fun activity left open for students to participate in. The library is open- she has organized it in ways students can understand. This past summer we made the switch from just the Dewey Decimal System to sorting by Genre, then by alphabetical order. This change has made it easy for kids to identify quickly and easily literature they want to read. The library is a place to go: students are always in there to do something; research, read, explore, or share ideas. Sometimes, we go in there just because she's there. Ms. Payne is accepting and easy to talk to, easy to ask advice of, easy to go to for help. This environment has made our circulation rates skyrocket since Ms. Payne became the librarian- she keeps those novels cycling in and out of her shelves.

Kids want to read, they want to be in the library. This is because they feel safe, they feel at ease, they feel invited in, and they sense literacy not just as a must, but as something to value by choice.

4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

When Ms. Payne came to Appoquinimink High School, it became her mission to integrate modern literature and novels of relevance into the classroom and curriculum. It started out with constant meetings- trying to introduce teachers to the power of the Young Adult genre. Since I'd been with Ms. Payne since elementary school, I couldn't imagine an English class without literature circles- a time for students to just sit with one another and discuss a book of their choice. However, many students who did not have the same exposure had no idea that reading in English Class expanded past the classics and could be fun to discuss.

Quickly, most English Classes were utilizing her literature circles- it became common to see students sitting in circles on the group, debating, wondering, questioning, venting- on works that varied from 1984 to Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock.

In addition, she has begun selecting the summer reading assignments- and fighting to keep them applicable to teenagers. When I was a freshman, the same year she started her job at the school, our summer reading book had been a self help book that only half of the student body read. (That might be an overestimate.) This past year, we read "Hole in My Life" by Jack Gantos- a young adult piece of literature that was much more relevant to high school students. Within the first few weeks of school, Ms. Payne had students eagerly discussing the subject matter, creating projects and writing essays- and it was in no way as much of a struggle as it was to engage students with non-relevant material.

Ms. Payne keeps things fresh. Modern YA and literature circles are not the only new things she brought with her. She constantly plans with teachers creating new projects- and not just for the English department. History, science, photography, business- students in all sorts of classes head down to the library with their teachers to

work with Ms. Payne. She has a class with her at least once a day- and it is impossible to tell what new project will be next- video broadcasting? A history of photography? Ms. Payne's goal of bringing relevant opportunities that engage all sorts of learners inspires creativity and innovation.

Ms. Payne is also the person who has taught us about research- an arguably mandatory skill for all students. It is from her that students learn the research process, including sources and databases- citations and formatting, where to find credible information. Every English class has time with her to cover these topics- and she has revolutionized the way my fellow students look at research.

All of her efforts to help teachers with lesson plans have enhanced our curriculum- our classes are scattered with interesting and creative projects, innovation and thoughtful research.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?

Throughout the 11 years I've known her, Christy Payne has always been trying to bring something new either to my school, the district, or students in the State of Delaware. She is an example of a person whose leadership and energy knows no bounds, and she is an inspiration to her coworkers and students.

The following events are only representative of her work- since I was a first grader she has been assisting in Education Fairs, creating a summer library community at the school culminating with a campout, special reading events, organizing school trips every year to the National Book Festival in Washington DC, and much more. However, there are two special projects, one she has started on her own and the other she saved from extinction- a gift to students to provide opportunities they simply cannot gain in the classroom.

One of the most notable district-wide activities we have is Real Men Read. Back when I was in middle school, Ms. Payne wanted to do something to inspire boys to pick up a book- it's become too common an idea that reading is "girly". Real Men Read is an evening literacy event for boys and men. Ms. Payne contacted and brought in men ranging from football players to snake keepers- to speak about the importance of reading. There are authors and comic book creators and high school students who come in to speak to younger boys about why flipping through the pages of a book isn't something just girls should do. This event has allowed boys to connect with people in literature. Real Men Read was Ms. Payne's baby, her creation. It has gone from a little event to one of the most anticipated evenings of the year- appealing to large numbers of students in our district. It was so popular, the girls look for ways to sneak in to try the attractions for themselves!

The second event is something that has personally affected me, and I can only hope my writing communicates my gratitude to Ms. Payne for her role in the Festival of Words (F.O.W.). F.O.W. is a daylong event centered in literacy and writing for middle and high school students. It brings in authors, poets, comic book creators and many more guests who speak and give workshops all day long. This event had been held at the University of Delaware since 2000. However, three years ago, Delaware librarians found out that unfortunately, the previous venue would no longer be available.

For Ms. Payne, that was not an option. She decided to take on Festival of Words, simply because it was one of the only opportunities students in the State of Delaware

have to access writing and literacy development workshops and real authors- free of charge. Taking on FOW was a big deal- it wasn't just a District evening event anymore. This would require a huge amount of fundraising for things from free lunch for all participants to flying in all kinds of authors. The first year FOW was held at our high school, Ms. Payne was able to secure in Walter Dean Myers, and last year, Ellen Hopkins. She had a wide variety of financial obstacles, but her leadership not only among staff at the school, the state librarians, and students who wanted to help was what made this event successful.

As a student, seeing her work so hard to keep the F.O.W. around simply because it benefits students all over the State of Delaware is one of the most inspiring things I have ever witnessed. This is an example of someone who takes action not for themselves, or even their own students, but for kids everywhere. She truly believes in the power of language and expression- and is willing to face whatever it takes to give students the best opportunities possible.

Ms. Payne has been honored as the Delaware Librarian of the Year. Knowing her personally, these types of accolades are not what motivates her- but I think it speaks a lot about how she is perceived by her peers. Everyone around her senses the real motivation, she leads because she loves what knowledge and literature bring to the world: a chance for students and a chance for them to make the world a better place.