



Nominee: Jessica Holmes
Westridge Elementary School
Frankfort, Kentucky

Nominator: Joe Lovell

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

It's not every day that a school librarian is selected by her colleagues as the Teacher of the Year at her school. It's not every day that a school librarian is chosen to be featured in a state-wide publication (Kentucky Educational Television Visions magazine) because of the positive impact she is having on student learning in her building. It's not every day that a school librarian gets asked to represent her profession by hosting principals from area districts in order for them to see what a well-run, flexibly scheduled library should look like. However, for our school librarian, this is all in a day's work. My nominee, Ms. Jessica Holmes, deserves to be selected for this award because she truly embodies what an excellent school librarian should be. Her incredible work ethic, creativity, and passion for her library and programs, numerous hands-on endeavors, and knowledge of both library and classroom content are why the students and teachers at Westridge LOVE OUR LIBRARIAN!

Charley Preston, assistant superintendent: "Ms. Holmes inherited a dismal library at Westridge that was only minimally used by students and staff. In less than one year, she transformed the library into a warm and inviting place for all."

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?

Having taught for many years, I tend to act as the "sage on the stage" in my classroom. Fortunately, Ms. Holmes has helped me to see the value of relinquishing complete control and allowing others to share in the responsibility of instruction. She initiates meetings with each grade-level team to discuss possible opportunities for collaboration and co-teaching. Ms. Holmes has shown me that not only can she supply me with a host of pertinent instructional materials, but that she can also provide direct instruction of content with which I do not possess expertise, such as current research methodologies.

Each year, my social studies students present a U.S. history living timeline. Ms. Holmes not only leads our students through the Big 6 research process, but also serves as an evaluator of the finished product.

Ms. Holmes guides me through the maze of complexity that constitutes the world of modern technology. She has helped me construct and maintain a teacher website that allows me to communicate more efficiently and effectively with my students and parents. She continues to tutor me in the use of my classroom Smartboard and its applicability for instruction and student use of technology.

Ms. Holmes assists me in providing differentiated instruction to address the needs of my gifted and high-achieving students. One way she does this is by hosting a Mock Newbery Club. The students involved in this club participate in a variety of activities: discussion groups with students from surrounding schools, presentations by guest speakers, field trips to the public library, and higher-order thinking assignments. She also works with students involved in Book Fest, a literature-based program for gifted/talented students identified in language arts.

Melissa Rash, Franklin County gifted and talented teacher, says, “Ms. Holmes has always gone above and beyond to help me ensure that the GT students at her school receive meaningful extensions to the prescribed curriculum. Ms. Holmes and I have collaborated on two different activities over the past several years: a Mock Newbery Club and Book Fest.”

In addition, Ms. Holmes directs the Battle of the Books competition, a county-wide reading promotion program and end-of-the-year academic tournament for 4th and 5th grade students. She also coordinates our participation in the Pizza Hut Book It! and Lexington Legend’s Hit the Books reading incentive programs. Battle of the Books, Book It! and Hit the Books constitute major components of our recreational reading programs. These programs have significantly increased the amount of reading our students do on a daily basis.

Ms. Holmes has been helpful to many other teachers.

Cari Hamlin, Westridge kindergarten teacher, states, “Ms. Holmes and I have collaborated on many different ELA units. I have a tendency to spout off ideas, and she takes those ideas to a completely different level by giving me many different resources and helping me implement the ideas. She is the main resource I go to when I need help coming up with ideas.” Mrs. Hamlin and Ms. Holmes are currently collaborating on a video competition piece to help earn our school \$70,000 in technology resources. In the past they have also collaborated on a Monopoly-based genre reading program in order to help encourage her gifted readers to read a variety of genres.

Angela Shouse, Westridge parent, states, “Each year our daughter, Nikki, receives new teachers, but Ms. Holmes remains a constant. Last year, Nikki joined the Student Technology Leadership Program (directed by Ms. Holmes) and now has a newfound love

of technology. Under the direction of Ms. Holmes, Nikki produced a feature film, made it to state (competition), and came in 3rd. The encouragement and guidance given by Ms. Holmes has introduced Nikki to a new passion and career option.”

Ms. Holmes has also improved student confidence, poise, and creativity by being the co-creator of the Westridge Drama Club. She has co-directed a school musical involving more than 50 children each year for the past five years. Andrea Cummins, Westridge 4th grade teacher, states, “The musical she and another teacher organize and direct are unlike any other play put on by an elementary school. People come from all over to watch them because they are so wonderful.” Parent Angela Shouse also states, “Our once shy little girl has blossomed into a young lady full of confidence and skill. Our very much loved Ms. Holmes has helped give this gift to Nikki and all the students at Westridge.” Due to her efforts, our school has become the premier arts integration school in our district.

Sahil Shaik, 5th grade student, says, “Ms. Holmes helps us to make our projects better by suggesting cool ways to incorporate technology! For example, she worked with me on a constellations project and suggested that I use Powtoon instead of PowerPoint. It made my project much better, and it was really neat!”

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

To quote Harrie Buecker, former Franklin County superintendent, “Jessica Holmes is extremely energetic, creative, and highly knowledgeable in creating and updating her school’s library media center. Her library is indeed the hub of the school’s activities. She is constantly creating an exciting and fun atmosphere for reading and learning.”

Students come to the library to work collaboratively on projects and to participate in a host of other activities. On a daily basis, our students are engaged in relevant and enjoyable hands-on, student-directed projects that address common core educational standards. On any given day, you will find students in our library listening wide-eyed to Ms. Holmes conducting read-alouds with her “special voices,” or you will find students nestled in a comfy nook silently reading a book, doing research, working on Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP) projects, building Mars Rover robots, editing videos, writing book reviews, engaged in Mock Newbery or Caldecott roundtable discussions, analyzing Future Problem Solving scenarios, practicing musical presentations, or performing routine maintenance duties as library aides.

Because she implements a flexible library schedule, Ms. Holmes has a steady stream of eager readers each day who constantly seek her advice on their next book selection. If you pass by the library near lunch time, you will see a group of students participating in “Lunch Bunch” as Ms. Holmes reads aloud a literary favorite.

Cari Hamlin says, “Ms. Holmes is constantly coming up with ideas to make our school grow as a learning community. She has a separate room that she uses as a “Collaboration Café” for teachers and staff.” The Collaboration Cafe’ brings teachers and the librarian together to improve classroom instruction. Four years ago, Ms. Holmes transformed an ugly storage space within the library into a comfortable, inviting spot for collaboration,

complete with hot coffee and dozens of teacher resources. Ms. Holmes meets regularly with grade-level teams in this spot, and some teachers even choose to eat lunch there.

Andrea Cummins comments, “Ms. Holmes goes out of her way to make our school a more fun and enjoyable place to work, play, and learn. Just this year, she put together a “Booknic” where teachers brought in a dish based on their favorite book. We had almost 100% of teachers participate!”

Perhaps the most obvious way Ms. Holmes makes our school a better place is by providing students with numerous opportunities to learn new skills, positively contribute to the community, and build relationships with their peers and teachers. The following are some examples of these opportunities she provides to the students in our building:

Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP) – In addition to working on individual and group projects, students who are members of STLP work collaboratively with classroom teachers to solve technology problems and to promote technology usage in the building. It is common to see STLP students assisting teachers and fellow students with technology issues or developing projects to help the school community.

Library Helpers – Ms. Holmes recruits and trains a group of students each year to be her helpers in the library. Thus, she provides students with an opportunity to be useful and to learn to love and respect the library.

Tornado Victim Book and School Supply Collection – Through her efforts, Ms. Holmes was able to collect over 3,000 books within our district and from out-of-state.

(Individuals saw her plea for assistance on her website and brought books to us.)

Working with the Kentucky Education Association to coordinate delivery, the collected books were delivered to Salyersville Grade School which had been severely damaged in a tornado. By mobilizing our students to action, Ms. Holmes helped students understand the need for community involvement and service.

Family Involvement – Ms. Holmes has worked in collaboration with our literacy team to host Literacy Nights during her Scholastic Book Fairs. Her semi-annual book fair sales have increased from \$3,600 to almost \$9,000 each book fair. In conjunction with her book fairs, Ms. Holmes hosts special events, such as “Muffins with Ma’ams”, “Donuts with Dudes”, “Lunch with Loved Ones”, and “Community Days.” These efforts help to build community and increase family involvement.

Special Programs to Promote Reading – Ms. Holmes hosts an annual Polar Express Party with primary students at Christmas. Students get to dress in pajamas, eat popcorn, read Polar Express, watch the movie, and drink hot cocoa. She also hosts an annual Spooky Story Lock-In with her intermediate students in order to encourage storytelling. These programs build community and an enthusiasm for reading in our school.

Multi-Cultural Events – Ms. Holmes and a group of kindergarteners Skyped with one of our kindergarten teachers who was traveling in China. She also coordinated a multi-cultural fair with our second graders while they were studying various cultures. These

opportunities introduced students to other cultures and thus improve their knowledge of the world.

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

Perhaps the most crucial skill to be acquired during one's elementary years is that of reading. Ms. Holmes possesses the rare ability to get kids excited about books and the stimulating world that lives within their pages. I have never known a teacher or librarian who motivates students to read as much as she. Whether she is book talking *Battle of the Books*, hosting a book themed lock-in, helping students to create their own book trailers, or holding a contest like the Book Character Pumpkin Decorating Contest, she is constantly promoting reading to both students and teachers.

When Ms. Holmes took charge of our library, our students were checking out books at a rate of 6,000 per year. She fought hard to implement a flexible library schedule in order to allow students to checkout more frequently and on a timeline that works with each student's reading ability. Her current checkout rate is 20,000 books per year. Our students' reading comprehension scores are above the state average, and I attribute much of that achievement to the amount of reading that our students do. Our school consistently scores at the top of the district in reading.

Ms. Holmes implemented a Lunch Bunch reading program nine years ago and it has become one of the most popular programs in our building. Each year she uses her lunch period to read a novel to students in the 4th and 5th grades. The program is optional, but almost every student participates. Her strength is her ability to find reading material that attracts even the most reluctant reader, especially boys. Abe Johnson says, "She makes us excited about reading and makes us want to read more books!"

For the past two years, Ms. Holmes has collaborated with teachers in grades 2nd-5th to create a "Book Tasting" event in which students were able to "taste" (sample) books from different genres and reading levels. This was an outgrowth of professional development that Ms. Holmes attended last summer. Thanks to her book tasting event, students are investigating books more closely and choosing "good fit books." The ability to find "good fit books" helps to build confidence in our readers thus improving their desire and ability to read.

Ms. Holmes provides essential instruction to all of our students on 21st century research skills which are a part of the Common Core Standards. For example, she collaborates with our 4th grade science teacher to teach 4th grade students the Big 6 research methodology in order for them to do their annual animal research project. Once the students have completed their research, she then incorporates technology instruction by showing the students how to record their presentations and turn them into QR codes to be placed on their animal models. To quote Christen Jones, Westridge music teacher, "Jessica Holmes is a true example of a 21st century school librarian. She strives to incorporate and teach the students and teachers about technology and literacy."

Tiffany Clapper, Westridge 3rd grade teacher and former instructional coach says, "Jessica Holmes' talents as both a librarian and an educator are a valuable asset to our school. As a librarian, she is able to enhance classroom instruction with model lessons

centered on technology integration, research methodology, and many other instructional strategies in a variety of content areas. She is equally versed as a technology and resource specialist. Ms. Holmes has a positive impact on student learning and the learning process.”

Ms. Holmes constantly works to obtain resources that are pertinent to many areas of classroom instruction. For example, she has purchased eBook subscriptions that address Common Core Standards that teachers and students routinely use. She works directly with each grade level to make sure she has the resources they need and even has a book recommendation form on her website to make requesting books even easier for staff.

Ms. Holmes has worked to provide resources for our program reviews in the areas of Arts and Humanities and Practical Living/Vocational Studies. She has collaborated with our music teacher to create a week-long, school-wide drama unit. She has also arranged drama assembly programs that tie-in with core content. Last year, she even collaborated with the art teacher to design and establish an on-line art gallery of student-produced work.

As if these activities weren't enough, Ms. Holmes has been the coach of our Future Problem Solving team for the past seven years and has helped our students win district and regional titles in the Governor's Cup Competition.

Julie King, Westridge first grade teacher, says of Ms. Holmes, “She is one of the most dedicated teachers we have in our building. She is constantly collaborating with other teachers, organizing, and planning activities to make learning fun for all students.”

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

Over the course of her eight years at Westridge Elementary School, Ms. Holmes has readily taken on various leadership roles both within our school and in the larger community. Her dedication to our students, school, district, and state is evident in her desire to serve all.

After being elected by her peers, Ms. Holmes is currently a member of the Site Based Decision Making Council at Westridge. Ms. Holmes also serves as the School Technology Coordinator and has done so for the past seven years. She is an advocate for technology integration and directs the Student Technology Leadership Program where she provides technology instruction to 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students after school. Her dedication to this program helped to earn Westridge Gold Status this past year, the only Franklin County school to have earned this distinction.

For the 2013-14 school year, Ms. Holmes received a National Girls Collaborative Grant to encourage girls to pursue careers in technology fields related to film and robotics. This grant allowed her to take 30 Westridge students to the Kentucky Educational Television headquarters to learn about video production first hand. This year, Ms. Holmes joined the school's Beautification Committee and is spearheading an outdoor classroom project, along with six students, to create an innovative, interactive, 21st Century outdoor

learning space. She was also invited to become trained as a Project Lead the Way instructor and will serve as a mentor to other teachers in our building.

Ms. Holmes also serves on the District Technology Committee and provides district and school technology training sessions. Ms. Holmes has provided training to new teachers in our district on how to use Web 2.0 tools in the classroom and on how to create and maintain a website. Last summer, she directed a district-wide Cinemania Camp where 3rd – 8th grade students learned how to create and publish video productions.

In addition to her technology trainings, Ms. Holmes collaborated with other librarians in our district to provide local 4th and 5th grade teachers with a professional development session entitled “21st Century Skills and Research Methodologies.” She also worked in collaboration with her district colleagues to create and distribute a Thinking Strategies resource list to support the district’s Thinking Strategies initiative.

In 2010, Ms. Holmes was invited to participate in the CATALYST (Collaboration Among Teachers and Librarians Yields Successful Teaching) grant offered through the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative. As a member of the grant, Ms. Holmes was personally selected to serve as an advocate for the flexible library schedule and has hosted numerous sessions to allow principals in surrounding counties to see a well-run, flexibly scheduled library in action. This has resulted in several area elementary schools implementing a flexible library schedule. CATALYST grant advisor Diane Goodwin speaks highly of Ms. Holmes when she says simply, “She is amazing!”

Also in 2010, Ms. Holmes decided to continue her professional growth as a librarian by pursuing National Board Certification. She achieved this distinction in November 2011 and was the first librarian in our district to earn this certification.

At the state Kentucky Association of School Librarians (KASL) conference, Ms. Holmes has provided librarians with trainings pertaining to the development of Mock Newbery and Caldecott Clubs and using Web 2.0 tools in the classroom. In addition, she has provided these same trainings at the Kentucky School Media Association Summer Refresher. This will be Ms. Holmes’s second year serving as a Kentucky Association of School Librarians Board Member. She also had the honor of nominating a former student for the KASL Outstanding Student of the Year Award in 2013, which the student won. This year, Ms. Holmes had the distinction of winning the KASL Outstanding School Library Website of the Year award.

To top it all off, Ms. Holmes was asked to share her expertise with future teachers and now serves as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Kentucky where she teaches Children’s Literature and Related Materials to undergraduate students.

Ms. Holmes has served as a leader in all facets of her profession and continues to strive for self-improvement. In my 35 years as a classroom teacher, I have had the opportunity to work with many fine librarians. I have never known an individual as passionate about children and their success as Jessica Holmes.

To quote Greg Roush, former Westridge principal for five years, “The school would suffer immediately should she leave the profession.”

Harrie Buecker, former Franklin County superintendent, says, “She is an amazing member of the education profession and is most deserving of this award.”