

2006 HONOREE

Robert Whiteman

Westmere Elementary School, Guilderland, NY
Early Childhood Education • K-5th Grade



Years Teaching: 15

Average Class Size: 20

Classes Taught Per Day: N/A

School's % of ESL Students: 5%

School Type: Public, Suburban

Type of Class: Self-contained-
Inclusion

“Throughout the last 15 years of teaching, I have noticed that when students’ lives outside of school are chaotic or too fast-paced, they have a more difficult time transitioning from home to school. It is difficult to help children achieve their full potential if they are not feeling emotionally or physically comfortable. Furthermore I know that students work harder and take more risks when they feel safe. Therefore, I have spent considerable time over the past few years reading and learning about the importance of the classroom environment in student success. Through reading and experience, I have learned how to use the aesthetics of the classroom to benefit both my students and me. Students find me calmly seated near the door and ready with a warm smile and a gentle ‘Good morning.’ This ‘easy entry’ allows me to focus on each and every child, greet them meaningfully and perhaps change the mood from a tumultuous departure from home and an unnerving bus ride. Then, our day begins with ‘free center time,’ a time which allows everyone to connect socially and to engage in an enjoyable activity. After having met their personal needs first, students are more likely to be prepared for the day ahead.”

“My classroom practice and environment reflect two key beliefs. First, in order to be successful learners, students



first need to feel comfortable and safe in the learning environment and with their teacher. Second, learning is the most exciting and valuable when it occurs in the context of the real world. Once students feel comfortable in the environment and with me, I find that the possibilities are unlimited. In all that I do, both as a first-grade teacher and an enrichment teacher, I strive to make students feel comfortable and excited about the possibilities for learning that surround them. Whether on the nature trail, on the stage, or at the supermarket, learning can be natural and fun.”

“I can attest to the creative, innovative teaching which sets Robert apart as a role model and teacher leader. He is a continual learner dedicated to improving children’s learning. Robert serves as a part-time 1st grade teacher, part-time gifted and talented teacher, and science teacher leader. Amazingly, he excels at all these varied roles. His creativity as a teacher has touched the lives of so many children who will never forget him.”

– Nancy Andress,
assistant superintendent for instruction,
Guilderland Central School District

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

WTEN Educator of Excellence (2001) • Guilderland Central Schools Teacher Recognition Award (1999) • New York State Kids Growing Food Co-Director Award (1999) • Times Union Newspaper Educator of Excellence (1994) • Presenter, “Balancing the Demands of the Teaching Life” retreat workshops for educators • Written curriculum for New York State Department of Education • Published in *The Project Approach Catalogue #3* and *New York State Reporter* • Member, Board of Directors, The Children’s Literature Connection