

I nominate Sonia Galaviz for the 2017 NEA Foundation's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Sonia is an amazing teacher, advocate, mother, counselor, and mentor for her students. She is fearless when it comes to advocacy and education. The NEAF Award for Teaching Excellence has five criteria: professional practice, advocacy for the association, community engagement, leadership in professional development, and attention to diversity. Sonia exceeds expectations in all five of these categories.

Sonia builds a classroom environment that respects and celebrates diversity. One of the many ways she does this is by inviting a student's family to participate in 'family sit down dinners' with her in the fall and spring during conference time to showcase the kids' work and the values that each family brings to their classroom. Sonia builds this culture in her classroom and with her students' families by spending the weeks before school starts each year to make a home visit with the families of each student in her class. She also attends extracurricular events which her students are participate in, such as but not limited to soccer games, Shabbat, and Diwali celebrations. Sonia understands the potential that can be reached when communities recognize and respect each member's cultural differences and work together to meet goals. I believe it is this understanding that makes it her priority to implement culturally responsive teaching in her classroom and in her life. She gives her students assignments that bridge their homes and school. Involving the family and home cultures in the classroom is key to her pedagogy. "I don't know how to do my job without the families," she said. "It's a blessing to get to know them and hear their story and how I can best teach their student. It's a partnership." (<http://bit.ly/20z3reV>)

Sonia works tirelessly to not only engage her students, but also their families and the community they live in. She worked to create sustainable and ongoing community partnerships with 14 different nonprofit organizations and departments at Boise State to create an amazing STEM night at Garfield Elementary school this school year. She recently received a \$10,000 grant from NASA and

Boise State University to create STEM backpacks. These STEM partnerships also brought the opportunity for Sonia to introduce computer coding, alongside BSU students and professors, to all 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at Garfield. Idaho's Governor, Governor Otter, was in attendance and her efforts were showcased in Idaho Ed News in December (<http://bit.ly/1XtyFSV>). Most recently, she was awarded a grant from Idaho's STEM Action Center to purchase robotic kits for her school. She will mentor new student groups this year with this grant.

Sonia works diligently for the union. She helped to organize the IEA Board of Directors this fall to participate in the annual Labor Day picnic. She also organized other IEA members to help with a phone banking campaign to increase the minimum wage in McCall, Idaho. She has served on the Nampa Education Association Executive Board and in several various committee roles. She has been a dedicated building rep for 11 years and currently serves as the IEA Member-At-Large on the IEA Board, a position typically held by a minority member. She is actively involved in numerous organizations and events that promote public education and support union members.

She currently sits on the National Advisory Board for Teaching Tolerance, the education arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center. She was honored (<http://bit.ly/25XMBdC>) by them in 2011 for one of five national awards in Culturally Responsive Teaching (<http://bit.ly/1S86xn5>). In addition to being published (<http://bit.ly/1NmX32T>) in their magazine, she has provided numerous workshops and professional development trainings using their materials, including our IEA Summer Institute. Sonia also currently serves as a mentor teacher for several Boise State students (<http://bit.ly/1oUNvG3>) and pre-service teachers.

Sonia is an amazing teacher who has dedicated her life to her students, to public education, and to her union. Thank you for considering her nomination for the 2017 NEA Foundation's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Sincerely,

Penni L. Cyr

President, Idaho Education Association

# Nominee Statement

**Awardee Statement:** It is my privilege to present my professional practice, advocacy for the association, community engagement, leadership in professional development, attention to diversity, and advice for new educators. Each component below is a summary of my pedagogy, praxis, professionalism and specific actions taken to benefit students, their learning, and overall academic success.

## Professional Practice

Each year I work to reinvent myself as a teacher, trying new things and exploring new partnerships to enhance my students' education. I have had significant success in partnering with my own classroom families to create a true community of learners, utilizing the expertise and experiences of the families to enhance our units of study and bring alternative perspectives into the classroom. However, I hold dear the calling of a teacher and embrace the chance to develop new opportunities and connections for my students, and the larger school population. The evolution of these ideas allow for rigor through integrated disciplines that continuously challenge students and envelop them in meaningful learning. As an example, most recently I have dedicated numerous efforts to bring STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) engagement to Garfield Elementary and my 5th graders.

I'm always thinking about my students' future. Who will they become? Will they have the support to go to college? Will they be able to do what they love? I believe with my whole heart and soul that educators have the capacity (and the charge) to inspire students and turn them on to ideas that can change their lives. Substantial STEM access and education is something that can be lacking in elementary schools, particularly within low-income communities. The families I teach do not have the funds to enroll their children in expensive science camps or STEM competitions. Thus, my focus to increase STEM access and engagement in my school, through the community and grants this year, has been in an effort to advocate for the children I teach and present opportunities that can affect their lives positively.

I planned and organized a community-led Family STEM Engagement Night in November of this school year. We surveyed the families prior to the event to find out what they wanted to see for their students along the STEM disciplines within their child's school experience, in a STEM event, and moving forward throughout the year. Fourteen community partners provided all of the hands-on lessons, with over 70 volunteers. A strong collaboration was created with Boise State University, our neighboring university, and was made clear that we were looking for sustainable partnerships. We estimated that over 500 students and family members attended. The parents were as engaged as their children. The excitement throughout the school was palpable and set the stage for further STEM exploration. Almost immediately, additional opportunities for our school community were revealed.

Subsequent to the STEM engagement event, I was able to coordinate the Hour of Code for all classrooms in grades 4-6 at Garfield in order to introduce computer science and software programming to the students. It got the attention of the Governor's office and Governor Otter, along with journalists and the local news, who were present in my classroom for the event. Drawing from our partnership with Boise State and the College of Engineering, Computer Science Department, several BSU professors and students mentored the students through our Hour of Code to make it a huge success. Governor Otter learned from my students and the experience, as he mentioned in his 2016 State of the State address. In addition, my students and I have been invited by Idaho's STEM Action Center to coach our state senators and legislators through STEM-related activities, during the Capitol's STEM Day, at the end of January. The students are thrilled at the chance to demonstrate their learning and share their passion for STEM topics. They understand the significance of gaining support and positive attention for STEM engagement in elementary schools and I see the potential for advancing political backing to create sustainable funding for STEM opportunities in low-income schools.

After the attention garnered from our STEM Engagement Night and Hour of Code event, my class was invited to participate in a Mars Rover Robotics competition this spring. Utilizing Garfield's new partnership with Boise State, I have enlisted the help of BSU's Microgravity Team, funded through NASA, to mentor my students. Inspired by this opportunity and aided by the excitement of my students, I applied for a grant through Idaho's STEM Action Center to purchase our own robotics kit, so that my students and I might sustain our robotics endeavor. I am pleased that I was awarded this grant and that my students and I will be able to continue exploring STEM integration through robotics.

These are a few examples of relevant innovations I'm exploring this year with my students, along with the rigor of STEM driven initiatives to enhance student achievement. Again, my passion is spurred by the opportunities these endeavors create for my students and the potential impact it can have on their lives, both immediate and in the future.

#### Advocacy for the Association

I come from a union family. My father learned the value of hard work as a migrant field worker in the 1940-50's. He was an active union member for over 30 years. I grew up hearing about organized labor as a kid before I knew what that was. Both of my parents grew up in poverty and had significant challenges with home and family. Neither of my parents made it past eighth grade. However, despite their lack of formal education, they are two of the smartest people I know.

My parents instilled the importance of hard work and education growing up. Their emphasis on school and learning was key to me discovering my passion for education. I joined the union my very first year teaching. I knew that a collective voice and having an advocate for my profession was something I wanted as a new teacher. Within a year, I found my place serving on various committees and as a building representative for the association.

My union involvement evolved into different opportunities to serve. I served on the executive committee for the Nampa Education Association as vice president and on the negotiations team. I was able to chair numerous committees in the Nampa EA, including Membership and the Children's Fund. I currently serve as the Minority- At Large member of the Idaho Education Association board and the president of the Women's and Minority Caucus. I have been my school's building representative for 10 years.

Aside from positions I've held or currently hold in the union, I work very hard to be an advocate and voice for my profession. I was an active organizer in Idaho's Propositions 1, 2, and 3 campaign and worked to raise awareness and gain support to repeal the Luna Laws, toxic legislation from 2011. I spoke out against Superintendent Tom Luna's merit pay plan in 2012, particularly his action of holding teacher bonuses because of the referendum efforts that year. I also helped organize meetings and rallies, and spoke to advocate for teachers, regarding the Tiered Licensure Plan and Career Ladder presented in the 2014 Idaho Legislative session. It has been my pleasure to testify during senate and committee hearings during the Idaho legislative sessions to be another voice and advocate for public education in Idaho.

At the request of the IEA, it was my pleasure to participate in television and radio ads surrounding a campaign for Idaho Public Teachers. I always say that I am an evangelist for education and for the teaching profession. Whatever building I work in, I strive towards 100% union membership. I am happy to say that I am one certified teacher away from that goal in my current school. Being a member of our union is about community, advocacy, and progressive education. For me, there is no greater profession than that of an educator. No other entity, outside of the home, can have the lasting impact that we can with children. Therefore I will continue to work diligently to support the causes and organizations that work to protect and enhance public schools and my profession.

#### Community Engagement

Cesar Chavez said, "We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own." In my classroom, there is a strong focus on involving and engaging in the community. In particular, my students learn to work within the school environment and with organizations around Boise to accomplish our goals as a classroom. I am a firm believer that service is a consistent way to connect with those around us and invest in causes bigger than ourselves. Because of this philosophy, acts of service and service learning projects are an integral part of my classroom.

Each year my students volunteer several hours with various organizations, like Rake Up Boise. Year after year, we are given the same homes around the school and have developed relationships with the people who live there. It is heart-warming to see my students' pride in their ability to help a neighbor. Another annual tradition is volunteering with the Idaho Food Bank and/or conduct food drives for the Salvation Army around the holidays. My school hovers around 87% free and reduced lunch. Many of my families live humbly and may not have a great deal of extra to share, yet each year we have broken our own school records on how much food we can collect for those in need. Often it seems that those with the least to give, give the most.

In addition to performing acts of service around our school and for community organizations, I incorporate service learning each year within my classroom. Last year, my students and I began our yearly campaign for recycling and sustainability around the school. We created multimedia presentations to teach each grade level how to recycle at Garfield and challenge the students to turn off the lights when not in use, reuse bottles when possible, use scratch paper instead of new paper, etc. However, we felt that the impact was not great enough and that our school population did not fully understand what it was throwing away on a daily basis and the environmental consequence of those choices. Thus the genesis for Zero Waste Day service-learning project emerged.

We partnered with a sustainability campaign, initialized by a small group within the Boise School District. My students' focus was our school community and making all the preparations for one entire day of "zero waste". It was harder than it sounds. The students calculated various costs for recyclable milk jugs, as opposed to the non-recyclable milk cartons. They averaged the food consumption at breakfast and lunch, as well as how much waste is typically produced. We worked together with the school's kitchen manager and staff to plan a breakfast and lunch that would be entirely "zero waste", with the district's Food Service personnel to approve various items needed, local farmers to collect our compost, and the janitors to help monitor the waste. When it was discovered that we wouldn't have enough real kitchenware spoons to serve with breakfast, my students organized a school-wide campaign to collect spoons from the families. Needless to say, we ended up with hundreds of spoons and an equal amount of committed students for this event.

My students designed and printed all the flyers to inform the school families about the event and invited them to participate. They created specific presentations, appropriate to each grade level, to teach the students about the day and what students could do to help. On the day of our Zero Waste event, my students were spread throughout the school for breakfast helping students dispose of waste properly, in compost bins and recycling containers. They worked shifts at lunch to ensure that it ran smoothly as well. When we were all done, the students wrote about their experiences, what we could do differently next time, and how they felt their months of planning and work paid off. They showcased this project for their families. Zero Waste Day was a service-learning experience that neither my students nor I are soon to forget.

#### Leadership in Professional Development

As an educator, I believe in life-long learning. I have recently returned to Boise State University to obtain my doctorate in education, focusing on advocacy and opportunities for schools with low-income, minority populations. I am continually seeking ways to enhance my practice, but also elevate the practice and pedagogy of teaching itself. I have had many opportunities to develop my own professionalism and have been fortunate to share and facilitate workshops, various trainings, and classes surrounding my passions within education. I am a firm believer in culturally responsive pedagogy and take every opportunity to conduct workshop and classes on that topic.

I was recognized in 2011 by Teaching Tolerance, the education arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center. They awarded me, as one of five educators nationally, with the honor of Teaching Excellence in Culturally Responsive Teaching. This was an amazing experience as I was able to work closely with the education advocates at Teaching Tolerance, an organization I had long respected and utilized. Subsequently, I was asked to serve on their National Advisory Board and am now in my second term in that role. Teaching Tolerance recently launched Perspectives for a Diverse America, a literacy-based curriculum that marries anti-bias social justice content with the rigor of the Common Core State Standards. This curriculum was to be piloted in only a handful of locations around the country starting in 2013. I was able to negotiate Idaho as one of the sites and helped to coordinate several schools around the Treasure Valley to be a part of the study. The pilot was extremely successful and this interactive curriculum is now available, for free, to everyone through the Teaching Tolerance website.

The training and materials I have received as a result of the partnership with Teaching Tolerance has allowed me to conduct professional development within my building and incorporate it into a recent graduate level course on Language, Literacy, and Culture for Boise State University. In addition, I was thrilled to teach a workshop at IEA's Summer Institute this last summer, focused on embracing culture and diversity in our classrooms by employing various methods and materials to develop inclusive lessons and a strong sense of community.

My professional growth has allowed me to connect in more meaningful ways to my colleagues in and out of my district. I welcome opportunities to share and exchange ideas, lessons, praxis, and pedagogy with others. Because of my concerted focus on STEM in my classroom and school this year, I have been invited to help create a toolkit for other schools to replicate those efforts and teach workshops on the action and opportunity behind STEM initiatives in low-income schools during district in-service days. Any contribution I can make to exchange ideas and the efforts of our expertise with colleagues both in and out of my school, I am happy to do it.

#### Attention to Diversity

In Latin there is a term, "en loco parentis", which refers to anyone with responsibility "in place of the parents". I take this quite seriously. I strive to be the teacher I would want for my own two children. To be a teacher is to be a mother, a counselor, a friend, a firm presence, and above all, an advocate. After my first year of teaching, I realized I was missing the significant collaboration with the home and family. I knew that if I was going to ensure that my high expectations of the students were to be met, I would need the families' help.

One of the things I'm most proud of in my work is the home-school connections I facilitate each year. Before the first day of school, I visit each and every child and their family that will be in my class. I build the partnerships that are necessary for me to be a successful educator and for the students to feel loved and supported. My students are an extension of my own family for the school year (and beyond). I have designed my curriculum to include the families in projects, the scaffolds to help them help their child with homework, and opportunities to visit the classroom and celebrate their student's work. Each year, I mold and shape my lessons to reflect the cultures present in my classroom. I work diligently to intertwine the collective stories of my families into my units of instruction as to validate and celebrate the diversity of our classroom community.

When it comes time for parent-teacher conferences, my class hosts a Family Dinner. Twice a year we gather together as a collective community, break bread, and celebrate our learning. The students set up the cafeteria like a gallery, creating exhibits of their projects and specific content areas, along with their portfolios. My approach to conference time is that we should be showcasing what the students have learned and spend our time and effort exploring their hard work and connecting with other families. Our Family Dinners are a great way to share in the experience of their child's education and allow each student to demonstrate, with pride, what they've been learning.

I cherish my classroom families. The partnership I develop with them takes time and effort, but allows me to be the best version of myself for and on behalf of their child. Year after year I have students enter my class who have struggled behaviorally, academically, and socially. Through a strong connection with the home, high standards and expectations, and consistent support, these students find success in my classroom. My students know, as do their parents, that what I do in my classroom is because I love these kids and want the best for them.

#### Advice for New Educators

Be brave. There are a million things that impact teachers, our jobs, our students, and can leave us questioning our efficacy. Don't let the elements outside your control stifle the passion that led you to teaching in the first place. Teaching with courage is not the path of least resistance. Without a doubt, it is a challenging journey that stretches our capacity and tests our spirit. It's imperative that we find ways to strengthen our intention to be the teachers we want to be, to take risks in the same fashion we ask our students to, and elevate our classrooms to a station beyond the current trends and buzzwords. We are the experts in our classroom. No policy person or lawmaker can compare to what we orchestrate on a daily basis. If we want to be treated as professionals on par with other occupations that our nation applauds, then we need to have the courage to take ourselves seriously in that regard.

Be diligent. If we are to maintain our resolve in the midst of rising expectations, diminishing classroom resources, while surrounded by an often volatile political arena, we must equip ourselves with the means, allies, and expertise to elevate our profession. As educators, we do not have to walk this path alone. Find work within the union and organizations that share your passions and enhance your practice. Create partnerships with community groups that understand the work you are trying to do and want to support you, your class, and your school. Volunteer for association committees at the local and state level. Find a way get a seat at the table because if we're not at the table, we're probably on the menu.

Be open. We ask our students to try new things, so why is it so hard for us? Dare to mix up your methods in class, challenge your pedagogy, and fold in new experiences. If you are doing the same thing year after year, it's time to let go. Teachers sometimes tend to hold onto their habits in the classroom, including methods and units, in a death grip. Let go and invite others in. Seek to facilitate your students as leaders and let them take the helm once in a while. Being open to new experiences in the classroom and trying something new will sometimes invite mistakes. However, those mistakes will summon growth and the resolve to do it better. What a powerful example for our students.

**Application Type:** Awards for Teaching Excellence Application



**Stephanie Myers**  
President

**Kathy Yamamoto**  
Executive Director

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January 18, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

It is an honor to craft this letter to second the nomination of Sonia Galaviz for the 2017 NEA Foundation's Awards for Teaching Excellence. Sonia's passion for teaching and her students start at home... her students' home. Sonia makes home visits to each and every student prior to the start of the school year. She takes the time to get to know each family; creating a partnership that focuses on the success of each child. Those relationships allow Sonia to be an advocate, a champion, and an outstanding educator. She takes a multicultural approach to teaching and to life; family, culture, ethnicity, tolerance, and values.

Sonia teaches 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Garfield Elementary School in Boise, Idaho. In the fall of 2015, Sonia sought out fourteen different community partners to create a Family STEM night at Garfield. Subsequently, she received a \$10,000 grant from NASA and Boise State to create STEM backpacks for Garfield students and will receive two robotics kits to use in the Lego Robotics Competition in Spring 2016. She has partnered with the Boise State University Microgravity Team to mentor students on how to build rovers.

Sonia is a consummate advocate for the Idaho Education Association. She works tirelessly to promote public education as building rep, Minority At-Large on the IEA Board of Directors, video and radio advertising, and winner of the Sam Cikatoga Minority Service Award. Prior to moving to the Boise School District, Sonia was Vice President of the Nampa Education Association and served on their Membership Committee and Negotiations Team.

Sonia Galaviz – educator, advocate, professional. I am proud to second her nomination for this award.

Sincerely,

*Stephanie Myers*

Stephanie Myers

BEA President

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208-345-4450



**BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY**

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

*Department of Literacy, Language and Culture  
The Literacy Center*

January 11, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter of recommendation in support of Ms. Sonia Galaviz's application for the 2017 NEA Foundation's Awards for Teaching Excellence. I can't think of anyone more deserving of this award than Ms. Galaviz. I have known Ms. Galaviz for 13 years and I have a deep admiration for her commitment to students, families, and the local and national educational communities. I also have tremendous respect for her vision in creating equitable child-centered learning communities where the child's knowledge is integrated in a challenging curriculum. In those communities, social justice issues are at the forefront and children's expectations of success are very high. In this letter I will highlight my impressions of the strengths Ms. Galaviz possesses to be nominated for the Marsha Nakamura Teaching Award.

Ms. Galaviz has gained the respect and admiration of students, parents, and colleagues through her passion for validating the role families play in children's education. On her first assignment as a teacher in Nampa, Ms. Galaviz began conducting home visits, and she has been doing so with all her students for the past 12 years. I have accompanied Ms. Galaviz to several home visits and was delighted by the way parents and students alike welcomed her. Ms. Galaviz was respectful and caring, placing the parents' expectations and concerns at the forefront of the visits. The students also participated in these conversations, sharing their goals for the year. She shares her curriculum and expectations for the student, and how this was the beginning of a year-long communication emphasizing that without the parents' support, she wouldn't be able to provide their children with the best education.

**1910 University Drive Boise, Idaho 83725-1725**

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*This letter is an electronic communication from Boise State University*

Ms. Galaviz plays an active and useful role in the school, the local community, as well as the national community. She has opened the doors of her classroom to mentor numerous pre-service teachers, who I had the privilege to supervise. I have realized that she is without a doubt one of the best role models in Idaho. She is patient, caring and giving. She spends many, many hours guiding pre-service teachers through the planning process and provides them with much appreciated feedback at every possible moment. Ms. Galaviz has been requested as a mentor by many pre-service teachers because she gained the reputation of being knowledgeable and caring, an important combination for a successful student teaching experience.

Sonia and I have collaborated on two publications (in 2013 and 2014). The first one was titled “The effectiveness of understanding relations between community, home and school for future educators”, published by *Gist Education* a Learning Research journal. The second one was titled “Community, home and school relationships we can’t ignore”, published by *Teaching Tolerance*. Furthermore, this summer we submitted a piece to *Rethinking Schools* on the subject of recycling and sustainability, as a school-wide initiative.

In sum, Ms. Galaviz is the best teacher I have ever encountered in my 30 years as an educator. She is not only committed to providing the best education to all students, but she possesses a capability to perform and succeed in very demanding settings. Ms. Galaviz’s ability to teach, engage in research, and participate in many capacities as a spokesperson for education, demonstrates that she is well-deserving of this award.

Sincerely,



Claudia Peralta  
Professor  
Department of Literacy, Language, and Culture