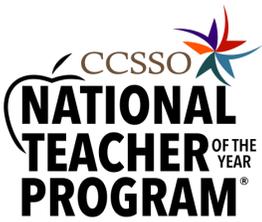


2023 National Teacher of the Year FINALIST



Harlee Harvey
Alaska

School: Tikigaq School
Subject: General Studies
Grade: 1



Harlee Harvey is a first-grade teacher at Tikig̃aq School in Point Hope, Alaska. She has been teaching there for nine years. Harvey was born and raised in Fairbanks, Alaska. Upon completing her Bachelor of Arts in elementary education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2014, she moved to Point Hope. Harvey taught fifth grade there for three years before transferring to first grade. While teaching fifth grade, she earned her Master of Education in English as a second language and bilingual education through the American College of Education in 2017. Harvey received her educational specialist degree in educational leadership from the American College of Education in 2020 and returned in May of 2022 to finish her doctorate.

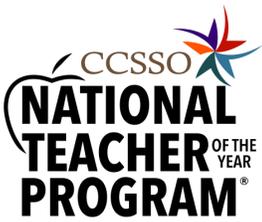
Teaching in rural Alaska has been a unique and rewarding experience for Harvey. In a region where most teachers leave within two years, she has thrived. Over the years, she has learned two of the most important practices she can implement in her classroom: culturally responsive teaching and relationship building with students, families and community. These relationships and authentic integration of culture in the classroom have allowed her to meet her students and families where they are, encourage academic and social growth and learn alongside her students as they teach her about their traditions and culture. It has been an honor and blessing for Harvey to be able to serve the students and community of Tikig̃aq and she looks forward to many more years.

Application Questions

- 1. Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning? Show how your deliberate instructional decisions create student learning and reveal your beliefs about teaching and learning.**

One aspect of my teaching that I take the most pride in is my ability to authentically integrate the local Iñupiaq culture into lessons. Since moving to Point Hope, I have been able to seek out opportunities and experiences that have allowed me to more effectively integrate the culture and local knowledge systems in my lessons. Over the past nine years, I have developed several lessons and units that fully integrate the culture with academics in the classroom.

One of my favorite units is a science unit aligned with the Next Generation Science Standard Performance Expectation 1-PS-4-1: "Plan and conduct investigations to provide evidence that vibrating materials can make sound and that sound can make materials vibrate". One thing I have learned about whaling is that whalers can use wooden boat oars to listen for whales. The whale songs vibrate through the wooden



handles when submerged in water and, when held to a whaler's ear, can be heard. This provided the basis for a week-long science unit on sound, which I teach each April during whaling season.

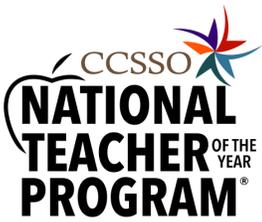
The first three days focus on building the foundational knowledge students need to understand sound waves, including how they travel and how they would look if they were visible. Students use instruments to explore vibrations, pitch, and volume and record their observations and discoveries in their science notebooks. During these first three days, students complete their first experiment where they hypothesize and predict how sound waves will affect salt sprinkled on a shrink wrapped bowl. They discover through this experiment that their sound waves can move through the air and physically cause the salt to bounce. These activities prepare students for the fourth and fifth day, where the connections between science and traditional knowledge are explicitly linked.

On the fourth day, we set up an experiment to see if we can hear sounds through a wooden object, like a boat oar. Students have lab sheets where they make their hypothesis about whether or not sounds can travel through liquids and solids. We then record the procedure beneath the hypothesis. Once students have completed these steps, they take turns sticking a wooden oar into a tub of water. Attached to the wooden oar is a pair of bone conduction headphones, like what swimmers use to listen to music in a pool. I have pre-programmed the headphones with a bowhead whale song, so when students stick the oar to their ear, they hear the whale's song coming through the wooden oar. Once all students have a chance to listen through the boat oar, we discuss our observations and record the results of our experiment on the lab sheet.

On the fifth day, I invite a whaler in to discuss how they use this information on the ice. They can talk with the students about how it is used and why they may use it. Bringing in a guest speaker makes that strong connection to the community and culture that would not be possible if I was the only source of knowledge. However, since this unit is taught during whaling season, a whaler is not always available. If I cannot schedule a guest speaker, I try to lead a discussion myself about how this might be useful when out on the ice.

There is an additional art extension activity we do during the week, where I help students record their voices saying, "Agvaqpanju!" which is the cheer used when a crew successfully lands a whale. Students then make a water color soundwave portrait of what their sound waves sound like. This project provides another opportunity to discuss how and why sound waves may be different. These portraits are displayed after the first crew gets a whale.

This unit is entirely interactive, allowing it to be accessible to all students. I rely heavily on discussion for students to share and communicate knowledge with their peers and with me. They have a lab notebook that is used throughout the week. This notebook



includes multiple choice selection questions for students to indicate what they have learned and relies primarily on illustrations to depict observations. On the assessment, students can illustrate their discoveries and write about them. For students who struggle to write, they first to illustrate what they learned, then orally tell me so that I can transcribe their sentences. In this way, I am not restricting my students who may still be struggling readers and writers to communicate what they know and what they learned.

2. Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in that deliberately creates culture in your classroom or school. Describe how you build and use relationships to collaborate and to teach students of all backgrounds, abilities and identities. What is the status of the project today?

During my first year of teaching, our school was in the process of adopting Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Half way through the year, the teacher who was leading this effort had a medical emergency and could not continue in her work. Even though I was only a first year teacher and new to the district, I was selected to head this effort.

Prior to my selection, the staff had worked together to determine which Inupiaq Values we wanted to focus for this program. We decided that we would focus on Respect, Responsibility, and Cooperation. We discussed what these values would look like in each area of the school and created a matrix that describes these expectations. This matrix was copied and posted around the school.

When I became the leader for the program, I worked with the district coordinator and school staff to finish preparing for program implementation. The initial implementation was done from Kindergarten through 12th grade, with little variation. We set up a reward system where students get tickets for meeting the expectations. I acquired some Tikiġaq School basketball jerseys from previous years that were still in good condition, but no longer needed by the teams. We used these as prizes, which was highly motivating for students at all grade levels. With help from high school students, we were able to have student-made posters displayed throughout the school. These posters provided visual cues for the behavior expectations in each area of the building, especially for younger students who could not read or understand the written expectations on the posted matrix.

I lead the program officially for three and a half years. During these years, teachers and school staff collaborated closely. During Professional Learning Communities, we would have discussions about how PBIS was operating and possible changes that needed to be made, including differentiating the program to meet the different needs of our elementary, middle, and high school students. The implementation stayed the same for elementary students during these years, but was altered for the middle and high school

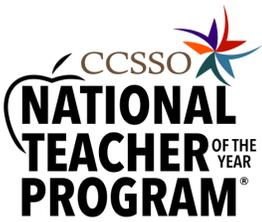


students. We started having separate meetings for different age groups. Elementary students received instruction and skits depicting the behavior expectations. Middle and high school students had two separate meetings. Instead of solely direct instruction and modeling, the Dean of Students would lead a discussion with students about behavior expectations and gather feedback from the students about what is working well and what could be improved. These discussions helped the students have more leadership opportunities in this effort.

After four years, the district no longer provided a position for an official teacher leader of the program. Despite not having a position, I continued to spearhead the effort, ensuring that new administrators were briefed on how the program works and encouraging regular discussions with staff about the program implementation. Until the pandemic caused school closures, the program ran smoothly for many years. Unfortunately, Covid-19 and school shut downs interrupted the program. With students schooling remotely and new administration coming in, the program stalled for a couple of years.

Since schools reopened in August, we have been working as an elementary staff to revitalize the once successful program. Since school opened, we have reprinted the tickets and started reteaching expectations to students in our classrooms. Elementary students have a meeting every Friday morning for the drawings and to celebrate their successes over the week. We are still in discussions on how to revamp the program for the high school students. With the teacher turnover and administration turnover there are differing opinions on how this could be implemented that are still being worked through. While the restart has been bumpy this year, I am incredibly proud of how maintained our PBIS program was for many years and how close we are to having a fully functional program again soon for all of our students.

PBIS has provided meaningful learning opportunities for students rather than the more typical avenue of punishment for students not meeting behavior expectations. Focusing heavily on positive consequences helped take some of the shame and embarrassment away from students who struggle at times to meet the behavior expectations of the school. Implementing PBIS in a culturally responsive way, through the intentional incorporation of Iñupiaq values, has helped engage students at all levels in our school. This cultural integration emphasis on positive reinforcement has helped create a more positive and welcoming environment for all of our students.

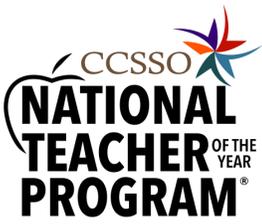


3. Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. Show how these community connections dissolve classroom walls and are used to impact student learning and success.

I have worked with the North Slope Borough School District for nine years. The history of education in Alaska for Indigenous Peoples is rife with trauma, that largely remains unhealed. One of the best aspects of this district is the emphasis on rooting education in the values, history, and language of the Iñupiat. This emphasis on integrating culture and community into the classroom in intentional and meaningful ways is one way that the school can start working towards healing this trauma. Over the past decade, there has been a concerted effort to develop a curriculum to meet the needs of students. This project is called Project Mapkuq. As a new teacher, I was unfamiliar with how to incorporate culturally responsive practices effectively. Over the years I have learned how to incorporate these units in my classroom, with such a level of proficiency that I was asked to serve as a mentor for the project in my building.

As a teacher coming from outside of the community, I had to humble myself in order to be effective. As teachers, it is easy to believe that we need to be the expert in everything we teach. That is not possible when trying to integrate a culture different from your own. Fortunately, I am able to collaborate closely with the Iļisauriit, or Iñupiaq Language Teachers, so that the work we are doing in my classroom aligns with the work they are doing in her class. I also worked very closely with paraeducators from the community. Our Iļisauriit and paraeducators taught, and continue to teach, me about different aspects of the culture. This helps me feel more comfortable knowing that the cultural components of the units are being communicated with authenticity and accuracy. On several occasions I invited community members in to present to students, including the President of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation who is a whaling captain from Point Hope. I know that I am not in a position where I can, or should, be trying to educate students on their culture. Guest speaker presentations are one way that this information can be introduced to students and used to meet the academic standards of the different units.

When speaking about Project Mapkuq and the integration of community and knowledge, I would be remiss if I did not mention the learning I do at the same time, from my students as well as the adults mentioned previously. There are so many times where I am a learner in my classroom alongside my students who willingly and proudly share their knowledge and traditions with me. It can be difficult, and certainly humbling, to recognize and acknowledge that students know more about a subject than I do. It took me several years, but I finally become comfortable with letting my students be the teacher at different times, sharing their knowledge with classmates and myself. I believe strongly that this demonstration of humility has allowed me to build better relationships with my students, ultimately contributing to their success.



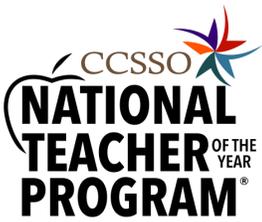
In addition to Project Mapkuq, there are several other ways that I have intentionally worked to build community connections in my classroom. I make it a priority to attend as many community events as possible, including Christmas and the weeklong celebration that happens after. My family has stayed into the summer for Qagruq, the annual whaling feast that happens in June. Most teachers do not attend as it occurs during our summer break well after school is dismissed. My family was blessed and honored to be invited on a whaling crew, where I have been able to gain first-hand knowledge of whaling traditions and practices while also having the honor and privilege of serving the community. Being invited onto a crew is an honor and actively participating in the activities, including cutting and serving whale meat and maktak to the community throughout the year. These experiences have helped me build relationships with parents and other community members beyond the typical parent/teacher relationships. These relationships with families have resulted in better school communication and improved student experiences and education.

I recognize that there is still a lot of trauma existing between the community and the schools. There is still much work that needs to happen for the school and community to heal this trauma and repair the general relationship overall, but I feel the efforts of teachers like myself are a good first step in addressing this issue.

4. Describe a time when you grew as a teacher leader and life-long learner as a result of being an advocate in your school, state or beyond. Describe your advocacy, how it helped you grow and how it impacted students.

Over the course of my career, I have filled several different leadership roles within my school and community. One of these roles is serving as a trustee for Iḷisaġvik College, the only tribal college in Alaska. An elder asked me to run for the position and I was selected by the borough assembly to fill the seat for the community of Point Hope in 2021. This experience has provided an incredible opportunity to be an advocate for my school and community. While I am a trustee for the college, my colleagues on the board know that I am a teacher first and have the interests of our young students in my heart, along with our adult learners.

One of the most impactful advocacy efforts that I have the privilege of being a part of in this role is representing Iḷisaġvik College on the quadrilateral committee. Nunaqqiurat Tumitchianjit, the quadrilateral committee, was formed within the past year. It includes representatives from four major entities in the region: The North Slope Borough; Iḷupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, which is the regional tribal government; Iḷisaġvik College; and the North Slope Borough School District. The quadrilateral was formed with the intent of improving collaboration and educational opportunities for the people of the North Slope, by encouraging the entities to work more closely together rather than undertaking goals in isolation.

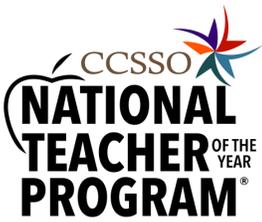


Being a trustee of Iḷisaḡvik College and a part of Nunaqqiurat Tumitchianjit has helped me learn about the connection between the local school district and our local tribal college, as well as how the major entities work together to meet the needs of our students and the people of the North Slope. I am a quieter voice at the table, preferring to listen to the elders and more experienced leaders of the Slope that are present. By listening, I have learned about the history of education in our region and how different entities worked together in the past. I have learned about the community perceptions of student needs and how these concerns may be addressed. As a young voice at the table, I do not want to disrespect others in the room by speaking out of turn or without the knowledge necessary to make informed contributions. By listening more than talking during meetings, I have gained valuable insight to how the local governments and entities can work together, allowing me to be a stronger advocate in the future for our students.

The work of the Nunaqqiurat Tumitchianjit has been incredible to witness and be a part of. Student Outcomes is currently working on creating a comprehensive measure of what a successful student looks like in our schools. This measure would include academics, social/emotional health, and cultural competence. Having a tool that is specifically designed for our students is going to provide students, teachers, parents, and community a much more accurate portrait of our students and measure of school success than we can get from a single standardized test or measure. The quadrilateral has also been working on addressing career and technical education opportunities. The current discussion is how to provide more CTE opportunities for students, whether that be through a residential learning center in Utqiaḡvik or on site in the villages. While this is an ongoing discussion, there is a clear intent to increase of opportunities for our students to explore the trades and careers they may be interested in.

During my time as a trustee, we have seen Iḷisaḡvik enrollment from Point Hope increase and an increased interest in the dual credit program for our high school students. Students are exploring Iḷisaḡvik and other options for continuing education, which has a positive impact on their performance in high school and goal setting beyond. The students are more engaged with the college and their higher education or continuing education opportunities. I feel that this advocacy has improved student engagement in the opportunities to further their education and opportunities after high school.

It has been intimidating at times to work with such influential members of the community, tribe, and borough government, but this experience has helped me grow to be more confident in myself and advocating for the students in my classroom and across the North Slope. It is work that I feel so fortunate that I will continue to be able to do on behalf of the community and students of Point Hope.



- 5. As the 2023 National Teacher of the Year, serving as the ambassador of education for the United States, you have been asked to give a speech to a large audience of teachers. This speech is being recorded and will be shared broadly with a larger audience. What is your message? What is the talk you give? [You may indicate a specific audience. For example, a “back to school” talk.]**

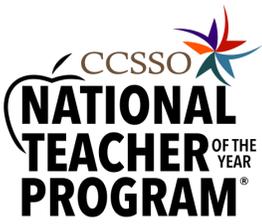
I would speak on be maintaining resilience and providing support for students and educators.

While completing my master’s degree in 2017, I started studying teacher retention. A 2016 study out of the University of Alaska Fairbanks indicated that attrition rates could be as high as 60% in rural Alaska schools, significantly higher than the national average. I learned that many factors were beyond the control of teachers, including district leadership, school and community relations, and parent support. Based on personal experiences and interactions with colleagues at my school, student behaviors and the struggle to meet the academic needs of all students compounds with the other factors.

Recently, especially since the effects of the Covid-19 on schools, teacher retention has become a headline across the nation. Bloomberg reported on September 2, 2022 that 2 in 5 teachers are planning to quit in the next two years. Teachers nationally are citing similar reasons for leaving: unsupportive parents, unsupportive administrators, increased work load, and inadequate salary. Again, many of these factors are beyond the direct control of teachers.

Yet, many of us are staying. We remain in our schools despite the struggles and the stress. Surely, there must be something that we can do to help alleviate some of these struggles and help our colleagues and ourselves avoid burnout. As I was researching possible resolutions to the issue of retention in rural Alaska, I came across the idea of ‘authentic communication’. Cotton describes authentic communication as “communication motivated by concern with an attraction to truth, beauty, and goodness”. In Cotton’s study, he found increased student performance and happiness through the implementation of a program that encouraged and modeled authentic communication between students and teachers. I believe the implications of Cotton’s study could go beyond the teacher/student relationship, to include all people needed to ensure a school operates effectively for students.

I was recently speaking with a whaling crew member from Utqiagvik, Alaska about the forgiveness and camaraderie of the Iñupiat. Part of this conversation centered around how collaboration is crucial to the survival. When it comes to subsistence activities, particularly whaling, crews welcome any help they can get, regardless of personal



relationships or histories. The work on and off the ice is physically and mentally demanding. Without a unified effort, feeding the community would not be possible. The reliance on others for success means that people have to be willing to forgive and resolve conflict.

As I reflect on this conversation, I keep thinking that schools and staff could learn from this. We have challenges that we face in school, conflicts with others that may seem impossible to resolve. Yet, just like the whalers on the ice, we need everyone working together to be successful. All of the challenges faced every day in our schools can quickly compound to create situations that can feel insurmountable. Teachers may start to feel like they are alone in their struggles. The tendency is to self-isolate. This inclination harms teachers, staff, students, and school culture. When we find ourselves in these stressful situations, the staff and students should be coming together to support each other.

Authentic communication and collaboration provide tools through which teachers can help resolve at least some of the issues we face in our schools. We need to collaborate, resisting the urge to isolate ourselves. Our veteran teachers, our new teachers, our paraeducators, our students, and their families all have knowledge and value that they can contribute towards the success of all in the school. We need to communicate in authentic ways, demonstrating concern and care for our colleagues and our students, and looking for the beauty in others around us. When there is conflict, we need to take intentional steps to help resolve it. Modeling this for students will also encourage them to do the same, as Cotton found. Students told Cotton that this kind of communication is what all people need, even though we rarely get it.

Just like all of the different people who make up a whaling crew, we need all of our stakeholders for a school to succeed. There are many things beyond our control as teachers. However, through the use of collaboration and strong communication, teachers can start shaping a more positive school climate and culture for all stakeholders. Especially in our post-Covid classrooms, making these efforts to work together is going to be a major part of moving forward, creating environments where teachers and staff will want to stay and where students will want to learn.