

Leanne Russell Maguire  
Torrington Teacher of the Year  
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There are not enough words to describe how blessed I feel to be standing before you. To look out and see my family here amongst my colleagues who have become friends, and those friends who have become family makes me feel overwhelmed with emotion. Today is a day I will never forget. As a child, teaching had always been my dream, and as a teacher, this honor is truly a dream come true. And, that's what teaching is all about, right, seeing dreams come true.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my family for being here today. Without each of you, I couldn't have earned this honor. My parents for always believing in me, my husband for allowing me to give my all to teaching, my grandma for teaching me love and resiliency, my in-laws for supporting me every step of the way, my brother for always lending a listening ear, and my boys for reminding me-to be the kind of teacher-I would want them to have.

Superintendent Susan Lubomski, Assistant Superintendent Susan Ferguson, Mayor Elinor Carbone, Representatives Michelle Cook, Kevin Witkos, Brian Ohler, Craig Miner, Jay Case, Board of Education members, administrators and colleagues it is an honor to have your time today. Sue and Sue, I especially feel excitement to work under your leadership. I have the utmost faith in the tone you will set and the direction our district will go through partnership and positivity.

When I received this honor, Andrew Deacon, a former teacher of the year, shared with me that countless hours this summer would be spent thinking about who I am as an educator, and that it would be the most self-fulfilling time. He was absolutely correct. These past 15 years have been hard, emotional, gratifying, and life-changing. But I have been blessed beyond measure because of you all.

So who am I as an educator? Well, most importantly, I am part of us. I love teaching in Torrington. My time spent preparing for today and remembering

moments with students, families, and my colleagues has deepened my love for Torrington Public Schools. I can say without a doubt that, I love us. I am proud of us. I believe in us.

Southwest School was my second home for eight years, and I would like to acknowledge John Pelchat who saw something in me. John, you were my principal for my first two years, but you have been my cheerleader since then. You have contributed so much to my life. You are my family. At Southwest School, we were always a family, and I was able to flourish there. I met the most amazing educators, and gained amazing mentors in Barbara, Julie, and Dawn. We all need people to look up to and I was surrounded. I was given a support system and had people to build me up and love me. I met people there that are like sisters to me, Kelley, Diana, Tara, Michelle-I feel so blessed to now get to raise our children together. Leaving Southwest School to move to the middle school was one of the most difficult decisions to make, and when I look back it is still bittersweet. I greatly miss what we had, but I have gained so much.

For the past seven years, Torrington Middle School has become my home. Within our walls, we are a mighty fortress. We have endured great stress together, and have come out stronger than ever. I feel so fortunate to be part of our team. We stick together. We support each other. There have been many who have given me support when I needed it most. A special thanks to Kathy, Barb, Trina and Sammi. Within this building, you all have supported me and welcomed my growth in many leadership roles. I thank you all for being there to motivate, inspire, and encourage me. Without you all, I would have missed out on so much. We are a family. Dr. MaryAnn Buchanan, I want to say thank you to you especially. You have guided me, and provided me with opportunity to grow. I am going to miss you at Torrington Middle School, but know that Southwest School is so lucky to have you.

Throughout the years, positions, colleagues, and schools have changed for me but one thing always remains the same-to be student-centered, make real-life connections, celebrate the joys and understand the hardships. Ultimately, it is what

is in our DNA as educators. It's all about relationships. How we connect, share, and come together is the most important-because without one another we cannot succeed.

A quote I came upon recently read, "Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about them" (Bronfenbrenner). As I started to think about how important this was for the children of Torrington, I kept catching myself thinking about how we need this, too. Every day, we seek to meet the needs of our students. We put in countless hours inside and outside of school. We do the "behind the scenes" work knowing that it might go unnoticed. So today, I want my message to be about us. Let's be irrationally crazy about one another. If we take care of each other, our students will reap the benefits. Let's notice one another. Today, I notice you. I see you and I hear you.

The relationships we form within our schools are models of healthy relationships for our students. It shows our students that it is okay to reach out for help, and that we, too, rely on one another when we feel like giving up. We can show that we are a family that sticks together and that you don't have to go it alone. I've witnessed the strength of relationships in my schools through the loss of a student, the loss of family members, long-term illnesses...grief at all levels. Within the walls of our schools, we can be that support system during the hardest of times.

It is no secret that change is hard, and many of us sitting here today are anxious about being in a new school, with different colleagues and administrators, and without some of the people who have become family. It is going to be different, and it's going to be bittersweet, but what I've learned from moving schools is that there are more amazing times just ahead...and your family WILL grow!

As we start a new school year, let's build relationships that enhance each of our strengths so that we can share with each other and learn from one another. And so, when we experience times where we feel alone, or we wonder if anyone sees the work we do or if anyone appreciates the extra--we can be there as each other's cheerleaders to showcase how proud of one another we are. Let's notice one

another. And let's tell one another that they are noticed. One thing I know for sure is that teachers are extraordinary, and if we open our doors and let each other in, we will all benefit by being in a supportive, learning community.

Someone who shared her love of Torrington with me, and became family was Nellie Crowston. She loved us. She was proud of us. She believed in us. In her honor, and in her memory, I want to share a final quote that I love from Mac Anderson:

“This is the beginning of a new day. You have been given this day to use as you will. You can waste it or use it for good. What you do today is important because you are exchanging a day of your life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever. In its place is something that you have left behind. Let it be something good.”

We have all been given this day to use as we will. Let it be something good.

This year especially, we are leaving much behind, but smile, and look around, because-what we have left behind is really *good*. Here's to us, and all that we have to look forward to. New students, new families, new colleagues, new administrators, new opportunities.

Thank you all for this honor, and I look forward to new beginnings together.