



2014 Arizona ELL Teacher of the Year - Raquel Tapia

Raquel Tapia graduated with honors from Northern Arizona University with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. Also with honors, she earned a Master's in Multicultural and Bilingual Education. Raquel has an SEI endorsement, a Reading Specialist endorsement, and a Bilingual endorsement. Ms. Tapia, who is a 1st Grade SEI Teacher at Mesquite Elementary School in the Crane Elementary School District, has been teaching English Language Learners for ten years.

Her first words upon receiving the award were: “It is an honor to represent the ELL population, as an ELL student myself, it is an honor to represent teachers of ELL students, and it is an honor to represent our community.”

When asked to describe her educational philosophy as related to teaching ELL students, her response was quite simple: “I know first-hand many of the challenges my students face in our agricultural (seasonal/migrant) and border town community. My goal is to empower my students to overcome these challenges while motivating them to learn and think for themselves. I became an educator in my community so I could pass on my personal experiences and show my students that academic success is attainable. The energy and passion I devote to their education transfers to their own love of learning. My students desire to learn and think for themselves, which is the very definition, in my opinion, of student empowerment.”

When asked to describe her most rewarding experience teaching ELL students, she says, “One of the greatest rewards of all is when I see my students develop a love for reading and independently using strategies to comprehend what they read. I tell them that once they learn to read, they can learn *anything*. I value their native language immensely, as I do my own, but I strive for them to recognize the value of being bilingual students as well. This is why another of the greatest rewards is when I hear my students conversing in English with confidence and mastering the English language to access content information. I know these abilities will follow them and help them be successful in their academic journey.” She strives to make each student feel valued which creates a very special bond with her students. Her passion, perseverance, and high expectations all lead to her focused and effective instruction.

Raquel consistently commits to professional development and holds many teacher leadership positions in her school district. At her school, she is the ELL team leader and the grade level team leader. For the district, she is a member of the math and grade level curriculum committee and has also been a member of the technology committee. As the ELL team leader for her school, she gives curriculum and ELL professional development presentations to other ELL teachers. In her pursuit of knowledge, she attends ELL seminars and conferences such as OELAS and TESOL. She has presented STEM seminars for Northern Arizona University highlighting strategies for problem solving skills, perseverance, communication, teamwork, and technology integration, all of which are crucial elements in preparing students for the 21st century.

Her parents settled in the town of Somerton, Arizona where she still resides with her family-her high school sweetheart, Oscar, and their only daughter, Eden. One of Raquel’s highlights in life has been watching her beautiful daughter develop a passion for learning and blossom into an exceptional writer. Aside from teaching ELL students, Raquel enjoys traveling, reading, and spending time with her family and friends.