

2015 Arizona ELL Teacher of the Year – Karen Hurley



Karen Hurley graduated from Arizona State University with a B.S. in Elementary Education. She earned her Master's degree in Elementary Education from Northern Arizona University. Currently, Karen is a fifth grade SEI teacher at Bret R. Tarver School in the Cartwright Elementary School District in West Phoenix. She has been teaching in the same district for 20 years. In fact, she replaced her own fourth grade teacher who retired when Karen began her career.

Karen's first words upon receiving the award were, "Wow! I'm overwhelmed with gratitude! I can't wait to tell my parents!"

Karen also stated, "Being a child of an English language learner, I communicate the struggles and triumphs my family endured with my students.

In fact, a high school education was out-of-reach for many; going to college was unheard of in their situations. I am still inspired by my hard-working family members, as well as my students' families, on a daily basis. The opportunity to teach in the ELL classroom is a huge honor, and I appreciate the support of my administrators who never give up on me."

When asked to discuss her educational philosophy as related to teaching ELL students, Karen's response was, "An effective ELL classroom is one that is run efficiently and provides a supportive learning environment where all students can learn, grow, and thrive." Karen sees it as her primary role to provide the language support students need to develop concept understandings while also developing their English-language proficiency. She strives to plan meaningful, engaging and well-orchestrated lessons. It is through intentional planning that students are able to gain skills that are crucial for their continued success.

Karen describes her most rewarding teaching moments as follows: "I love it when my students slip and call me "Mom" instead of Mrs. Hurley. In my heart, I know that means that they feel safe in the classroom. I'm inspired while watching my ELL students struggle with some tough concepts only to see them deepen their understandings. Hearing them speak in complete sentences in front of their peers or on camera or produce a blog entry is most rewarding. I love when they cheer for grammar instruction. They make me tear up when they give me sweetly drawn pictures, dawdle at dismissal time to get hugs, or cheer for each other's successes."

Karen is committed to acquiring new skills and strategies to help her ELL students be the best they can be. As a master teacher, her classroom serves as a district SEI model of compliance, first-best practices in the four-hour block, consistent application of SEI strategies, and technology integration to support language development. Karen is a district iTECS representative due to her proficiency and skills in technology integration. She is helping all teachers on campus foster their own technology usage and integration. Karen's classroom has been selected as an iClass21 classroom where all students are equipped with one-to-one iPads and other technology. This is an excellent opportunity for Karen to collaborate with the ELD Technology Specialist, and work together to ensure her classroom is a fun and exciting environment in which her students can learn.

Karen's parents, both originally from rural North Dakota, moved their family of six to Phoenix in 1980. Karen and her high-school sweetheart, David, just celebrated their 19th wedding anniversary and are raising their two teenage daughters, Anastasia and Katherine, in Peoria. Besides teaching, Karen loves to read, watch movies, go to concerts, bowl, scrapbook, and spend time with her whole fun family.