

I Love My Librarian!

Award

Tracie Walker-Reed
H. Grady Spruce High School
Dallas, Texas

Nominated by: Patricia Peterson, Candace Miller, and Griselda Whitaker

Famous author Matt Haig once wrote, “Librarians are just like search engines, except they smile and talk to me...and they have actual hearts.” This quote describes our wonderful librarian, Tracie Walker-Reed, perfectly. What separates her from Google, DuckDuckGo, and Bing? She has a heart, and her heart allows her to respond to the needs of her H. Grady Spruce High School family. For us, not only has Ms. Walker-Reed been a bridge to literacy, but also, she has unofficially acted as a liaison between educators and the community, as well as acted in numerous support roles to enrich the endeavors of the school and the scholars. Her willingness to go above and beyond her role as a Media Specialist is evident in the positive impact that she makes on our campus.

In what ways does the nominee go above and beyond in their role as librarian?

Ms. Walker-Reed is prepared to serve her school community in any capacity in which she’s needed. No role is too large that she’s not willing to tackle, nor one so menial that she thinks herself too good to accept. She is a substitute teacher, a testing administrator, tutor, coordinator and sponsor. You can find her doing a variety of tasks outside her role as librarian, such as repairing broken headsets for TELPAS testing, locating computers on wheels (COWs) and making sure they are all working and charged, or making emergency copies for frantic teachers. She’s responsible for setting up the library for Staff Development sessions and workshops, ensuring that all technology and equipment are working. She prepares the library for testing, making sure that there are enough tables and chairs, and that they are spaced correctly. She also serves as a proctor for these exams when needed. Ms. Walker-Reed does all of this without complaint and with a smile. Even though she takes on these extra assignments, she never allows them to interfere with her true purpose, which is helping to grow our school’s culture of literacy.

Through her versatility, Ms. Walker-Reed has been able to collaborate with educators and support their programs. For example, this past summer she supported the English department by helping to organize our EOC I & II summer boot camps. Although she has done this before, this time she not only coordinated media for the entire program, which served over 250 testers, she voluntarily stepped in to provide instruction to improve reading comprehension. This additional tutoring resulted in an increased number of rising sophomores and juniors who either met or mastered the STAAR objectives. Because of this increase, our campus received three distinctions in ELAR. “Ms. Walker-Reed is amazing at what she does,” states the head of the English department, Mrs. Candace Miller. She continues by saying that she can see the impact that Ms. Walker-Reed has made on the students and staff. Mrs. Miller is also extremely grateful for the times that Ms. Walker-Reed has stayed late so that her Advanced Placement

students could use the library computers to do homework. She adds, “As much as I appreciate it, I know the students are beyond thankful that she is willing to sacrifice the time she could have with her family, to stay into the evening to help them.”

Not only does Ms. Walker-Reed support the English department, she uses her many talents to promote literacy throughout the whole school. Read 180 is another program that has benefitted greatly from Ms. Walker-Reed’s skills. “Ms. Reed is always willing to share her wealth of knowledge with our student body,” explains Ms. Griselda Whitaker, Reading Team Lead. When the Read 180 teachers were searching for strategies to encourage reluctant readers, Ms. Walker-Reed introduced Overdrive, an alternate reading source that promotes reading in a tech driven world. Overdrive allows students to feel comfortable reading their chosen books at home without fear of accidentally leaving them behind when returning to school and/or losing them. Because she is a big advocate of Read 180, she purchases many library books that coincide with the Independent Reading component of the program. This gives students (of various interests) a larger pool of novels from which to choose. At the end of each year, eligible students are awarded “Most Read” prizes, such as Kindles and tablets. Ms. Walker-Reed has been instrumental in securing these prizes and more for the ceremony. Most importantly, she has demonstrated her desire to serve our student by simply asking them, “What books would you like to read?” She strives her best to make sure the library is stocked with their requests.

Ms. Walker-Reed encourages literacy in our school by taking on the role as co-teacher with our faculty. She plans with teachers in order to learn the topics that are being taught in each content area, so that she can acquire the appropriate texts. With these books, students can further explore their interest in the subject or use them for research material. Teachers are grateful because these resources contribute to the student’s greater understanding of the specific content.

Although Ms. Walker-Reed knows that without literature there can be no culture of literacy, she also understands that it takes more than book information to create a positive learning environment for students. Therefore, she readily takes on other needed roles. She not only heads the prom, homecoming, and graduation committees, but she also sponsors numerous clubs, organizations, and committees for our students. Over the years, she has sponsored the Ladies of Class, an organization that focuses on empowering young women and teaching them social skills; the Decathlon UIL event, bringing home several medals every year; and the Teen School Board, a student advisory group consisting of the junior and senior class presidents. They meet monthly with the superintendent and the Board of Trustees. In fact, a student member of the teen board recently gushed that the trip to Dallas ISD was an “eye-opening experience,” one that she will never forget. She is very thankful to be part of this organization. Without people like Ms. Walker-Reed who are ready to “wear different hats,” this young lady would not have been given the opportunity to be a part of district decisions that impact them and over 10,000 other students district-wide.

How does the nominee make their community a better place?

Ms. Tracie Walker-Reed’s presence makes our school a better place. Her humble and generous spirit creates a warm and inviting place in the library for scholars and staff. All who step in know that they are welcome. Not only is it routine to see the school community browsing through the many title selections, but also it is common place to see teachers collaborating with one another, student groups working on projects, committees meeting and planning, teachers tutoring, administrators strategizing, and counselors

discussing grades and credits with their students. Likely, Ms. Walker-Reed is right in the middle of this hub of activity, if not gathering resources and materials, researching topics and organizing information, guiding students to the appropriate books and websites, making copies, and answering questions, then she's organizing homecoming, prom, and senior activities, coaching UIL teams, and planning graduation programs. She is constantly available to assist those who may need her.

Because Ms. Walker-Reed shares Maya Angelou's belief that "any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading...is good for him," she wants every student who enters the doors to know that he is appreciated and that she cares about his interest. Therefore, she ensures that the library is filled with books of different interests, topics, and genres that appeal to most young people. Knowing that our student body consist of varied lexiles, she also supplies each genre section with a variety of reading levels, making sure that even our struggling readers can enjoy a good book. Likewise, Ms. Walker-Reed is just as concerned about our avid readers. For them, she has acquired a long list of popular authors who appeal to the diverse ethnic and age groups within our student body. When students express an interest in a body of work, she not only purchases that book (or finds it at another school library) but its sequels, if any. Students regularly make known their title choices to Ms. Walker-Reed because they know she will fill their requests. Lastly, Ms. Walker-Reed has been known to make a student feel special by walking him or her throughout the whole, huge library to find that one book that may spark his or her interest in reading. She does this because she cares about our students experiencing the benefits of being lifelong readers.

Ms. Walker-Reed's attentiveness doesn't stop at the end of the school day. It continues throughout the afterschool tutoring hours. Whereas some schools close their library doors immediately after the dismissal bell, Ms. Walker-Reed keeps our open. One group that has profited from her generosity is our football team. Every Monday for the last four years, the team has met in the library for peer tutoring and class assignment preparation sessions. Coach Carl Richardson, Athletics Director, explains, "Ms. Reed is a valuable part of our tutoring process. She not only helps the team locate appropriate study resources for their classes, but often, she helps tutor our young men." Because of the relentless help she has provided over the years, Coach has seen an improvement in individual team member's grades and test scores. As an educator, Ms. Walker-Reed believes that all students should excel in academics, and therefore, she continues to open the doors to athletes because they are students first. Coach Richardson adds, "I appreciate the time and dedication that she shows not only to athletics, but to the student body as a whole." Another organization that has helped our students through the library's afterschool open-door policy is City Year. City Year members help our students who are struggling academically, by tutoring them and helping them develop appropriate behaviors and mindsets. During the day, the Corps members spend their time with students who have been pre-selected, but after school they are available to help all students. That's where Ms. Walker-Reed helps. She opens the library doors so that City Year members can reach their goal of helping our students "succeed in school and in life."

Ms. Walker-Reed's generosity extends to the community as well. She opens the library to students and their families for various college readiness workshops, and she allows the neighborhood to borrow books. This helps to keep a lack of access to reading materials from becoming a barrier to literacy for the whole community.

What makes the nominee a leader in the school community?

It has been stated by candidates seeking election in the zip code where our high school is located that our schools and citizens in this particular section of the city are inundated with a variety of societal challenges: the highest crime rate, highest death rate, highest pregnancy rate, lowest median income, and lowest amount of funding in the city. The needs in this area are great. Students do not have access to technology in many cases in their own homes except for perhaps a cell phone, which limits their ability to complete research and projects. Additionally, the vast majority do not have internet access although they have calling capabilities on those phones. Once again despite the numerous tasks she must fulfill, Ms. Walker-Reed provides hope to the forgotten sector of the city.

She opens the library to students an additional hour after school Monday through Thursday. On Mondays the student athletes and others are permitted to improve academics with tutoring led by athletic director, Coach Carl Richardson and Ms. Walker-Reed. Then on Tuesdays-Thursdays, Ms. Walker-Reed oversees the "Study Buddies" tutoring led by City Year members. No matter the situation, regardless of the time of day, or the weight of the imposition, Ms. Walker-Reed sacrifices self to provide service in any capacity she can. For example, one day while I was in the library, I overheard a student say he asked his teacher about a problem he was having as he attempted to complete the assigned project for his class. He stated that when he asked his teacher about the issue, the teacher was unsure of how to guide the student and simply said, "Ask Ms. Walker-Reed, she'll know."

Everyone on staff-- from utility workers, custodial staff, clerks, teacher assistants, teachers, monitors, assistant principals as well as the principal-- rely on Ms. Walker-Reed to assist with technology and research throughout the day. On that same day, two custodial staff members came to Ms. Reed for assistance with completing requirements for all employees on the district website. They were stressed about the requirements and did not have computers or laptops available to them for their personal use. They came in early before their evening shift to get help. Although Ms. Walker-Reed was completing a detailed report for our central division, she stopped working on her library report, took the staff members to computers and personally walked them through the process. These staff members felt completely comfortable requesting assistance from Ms. Walker-Reed. She treated them with dignity, respect, and caring just as she does with all who enter the vicinity of the library. When I inquired about her typical day and how often she has had a day like the one I observed, with a gentle and genuine smile, she said, "Every day is like today; that's what I am here to do."

Our school motto is "Everybody is Somebody, I care" is best demonstrated daily by Ms. Walker-Reed. The paths she has taken to make a difference in the lives of all members of the Spruce family is overwhelming. She impacts the school community one person at a time, one day at a time. She is an inspiration to all who have met her. She never settles for less than her best and challenges those around her to strive to become their best.

Finally, she portrays the idea that "the service we give is the rent we pay for the space we occupy." It is for all of these reasons we believe our librarian is one in a million and deserving of this honor.

How has the nominee improved your life or the lives of others in your school community?

Having been raised by a strong single parent and growing up in a "depressed area," yet having been afforded the beneficial opportunities and education of the elite, Tracie Walker-Reed knew and knows

both sides of the track and vowed at an early age to make a difference in the lives of inner city minority youth and to open new and diverse horizons for them that they possibly would not see. She knew then and knows even more so now the value of an education and the potential which can be found within the pages of a book and in the mind.

She began to transport that knowledge and love for learning as librarian and conservator of thousands of books. Tracie developed reading programs and tutorials each Tuesday and Thursday after school. One such program is “Study Buddies.” The program is designed as a lower level reading program to tutor students in a non-threatening environment where they can develop their skill base and confidence without judgment and ridicule. Additionally, on Mondays and Wednesdays, Tracie oversees an athletic tutoring program to provide academic assistance to young men and women who wish to remain athletically eligible and academically sound while looking forward to college and careers. She instills in them the need for study at all level and in all areas of their scholastic achievement.

In the larger community of her feeder pattern, which includes 10 schools and more than 10,000 students, she is the lead librarian for all the elementary schools in the southern area, library coach for the Feeder Pattern, and coordinator for the Teen Council. In all these capacities, she impacts students and teachers supporting their needs in the classroom and outside as well. Whether the need is Lexile level reading literature, video media, computer access, computer training, or technology, Tracie has the expertise and shares it willingly. She is directly accountable for updating each library and its shelves keeping them current and attractive. Students and teachers entering the library comment often on the seasonal arrangements and the displays of books for each cultural, holiday, and school event.

Keenly aware that she is serving a population which comes from and will return to neighborhoods which have been labelled as having the highest crime rate in the city as well as the highest mortality rate, pregnancy rate and dropout rate, Tracie almost single handedly seeks to make a difference one student at a time. Her mantra is “If one student catches the flame for learning, he/she can pass it on.”

Although she is extremely busy as a mother and attending school herself, Tracie still makes time to follow the students to graduation as coordinator of graduation.

Lastly, because of Ms. Walker-Reed, our library is more than just a place that houses books. Within its walls also dwells warmth, compassion, and a heart of gold. Timothy Healy said it best with the following quote: “The most important asset of any library goes home at night – the library staff.” I agree, without the librarian, the library is just another empty room.

At our school, our unsung hero is Tracie Walker-Reed.