



Nominations for: Charlotte Carr Vlasis

Librarian

Chattanooga School for the Liberal Arts
Chattanooga, Tenn.

Nominator: Cindy Gaston

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

Charlotte Vlasis has created a library environment where research-based learning and passion for reading abound. Her love of learning shines through in her work with both children and adults. She is more than just the keeper of the books. In her work with students and teachers, Mrs. Vlasis has made the library the hub of lifelong learning at CSLA. In the words of a 7th grader, "She always has a good spirit. She is also very smart. She knows her way around a library!"

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school?

CSLA is a K - 8 school, and Mrs. Vlasis instills a love of reading in children of all ages and abilities. She makes the library a fun, accessible place where students feel free to explore and ask for help. She reads stories to all ages, knows students passions and interests, and helps students find just the right book. The students say it best:

"She always knows where just the right books are and what the best books are in a certain genre. She's a very good teacher AND librarian." –Middle School Student

"When I don't know where a book is, she helps me." – Elementary Student

"One time I was working on a merit badge for Boy Scouts, and she didn't care that it was not school-related. She helped me anyway. She really inspires kids to try different book." –Middle School Student

"Mrs. Vlasis is the best librarian in the whole world!" – Elementary Student

"She'll help any kid in the school. I love you, Mrs. Vlasis!" – Elementary Student

In addition to checking out books, students also come to the library to learn. Whether in whole classes or small groups, students come to research various topics throughout the school year. Mrs. Vlasis hosts research groups to support these classroom projects. Mrs. Vlasis is adept at helping them to find resources and to use them effectively. She creates graphic organizers to make research doable, even for kindergarteners. One of the kindergarten teachers said, "Charlotte models and teaches our young children the process of researching, learning new things, and presenting that new information. Kindergarten students love to research!" She does author studies to complement reading instruction. She judges debates, giving students feedback that is insightful and meaningful. Student learning is a top priority to Mrs. Vlasis.

Each year, Charlotte mentors several students during the culminating 8th grade research project. Students choose a topic, then research and write a series of articles to produce a “magazine” on the topic. Mrs. Vlasis is very good at helping students to write research questions around their chosen topics. As they begin their research, she guides them towards appropriate resources to find a wide variety of information. The 8th grade teacher said, “Charlotte is an amazing exit project mentor. I remember one student who did not successfully pass his exit project. She had him come back to CSLA during the summer to re-do some of his magazine in order to make it acceptable. She even lined up a tour of a local news/tv station and took him there to do some hands on research. She helped him write an article about his day. And all of this was done without any benefit of pay or overtime hours.” Mrs. Vlasis regularly displays his type of dedication to student learning and success.

In addition to her work with students, Mrs. Vlasis is a collaborator with every teacher in the school. She plans with all the teachers and brings her creativity to the work of curriculum and project design. She is good at seeing the big picture, but also has a clear understanding of the necessity for the details to get there. She assists with vertical planning so that the curriculum is coherent for students who are here for their elementary and middle school years. Because she is involved in the planning, she knows what teachers will need and supports them in many ways. She is also skilled at facilitating professional dialogue. Her calm demeanor and quiet competency make her approachable to the faculty. A former principal of the school said of Mrs. Vlasis, “She is a very capable resource person, but also is an active participant in each teaching team.” She finds the balance of providing support to teachers while still holding them to the highest of expectations.

3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Mrs. Vlasis has been the librarian at CSLA since 1998. From the onset she has consistently promoted a flexible library schedule. Teachers can schedule time in the library to fit their instructional needs. Students are welcome to check out books at any time. She has truly made the library the hub of learning, and supports teachers and students. A 5th grade teacher said, “Charlotte has always made time for me. She knows how to find the resources needed to enhance instruction and student learning. Her willingness and eagerness to serve faculty and students is contagious.” Charlotte is truly selfless in all that she does. She quietly and competently guides students and colleagues alike to use their gifts to realize their full potential. She encourages and models collaboration among adults. The learning community is made stronger by her ability to build knowledge and resources for solid instruction. The current principal put it this way: “Charlotte challenges teachers to think deeply about their craft. That is an unusual characteristic for a librarian. She doesn’t see herself as a one-dimensional teacher, but helps empower all teachers to be better.”

“She is discerning about what initiatives support the vision, and works towards sustainability in everything she does.” - Retired School Counselor

“She provides a common meeting ground, wise council, protocols to help with analysis and a safe place for professionals to share their successes and failures which creates trust and a ‘we-are-in-this-together’ climate.” –World Language Teacher

“If someone mentions a topic or a unit of study, Charlotte immediately knows what books we have to support that unit of study. I have never worked with a librarian who had such an extensive knowledge of the inventory. Charlotte is phenomenal!” – Exceptional Education Teacher

“Charlotte is always willing to be flexible and work with us on anything and everything we need. She can NEVER retire.” – 1st Grade Teacher

These comments attest to the impact Charlotte has on the culture of the entire school. A lifelong learner herself, she helps our school achieve our vision: a community of caring and lifelong learning.

4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

The Paideia philosophy is the foundation of everything we do at CSLA. It is based on the belief that all children can learn, and all children deserve the best education possible. In this democratic form of schooling, there are three types of instruction, known as the three columns. They are didactic instruction for teaching facts and information, academic coaching for teaching skills and processes, and Socratic seminar for teaching big ideas and concepts. Mrs. Vlasis has found ways for the library to support all three of the columns of teaching.

Beginning with the planning process, Mrs. Vlasis helps with the development of curriculum in the three columns. She provides resources to support didactic instruction and coaching in the classrooms. She allows for teachers to schedule the library for groups to come to do research, author studies, and to check out books. She is an expert in planning and facilitating Socratic seminar, and helps many teams to select seminar texts and write questions. She is also influential in mentoring new teachers to the building. Because of her consistent guidance in weekly planning, she has contributed to the strong culture of teaching and learning.

In the words of a 4th grade teacher, “Charlotte is a dreammaker. She makes my lesson dreams come to life. All she needs is the idea and she can come up with the methods, strategies and resources. It is such a blessing to work with her.”

Her impact on creating a culture of readers is immeasurable. Students at CSLA read a lot, the love of reading is evident throughout the school. Of course, reading happens in classrooms during middle school reading workshop, at elementary literacy stations, and in content area classes. The library supports all that reading in a variety of ways. Students can check out books anytime and as often as they wish. Teachers work with Charlotte to borrow the appropriate books for classroom libraries. Charlotte sends content related resources to the classrooms to support units of study. Most of all, Charlotte helps kids find books that are just right for them. We asked a few parents about the Charlotte’s impact on their children as readers. Here are their comments:

“I have 2 boy readers who enjoyed reading, but couldn’t find anything interesting to read. She went out of her way to find books for both of them.” –Parent of 3 Elementary Students and 1 Middle School student

“My children love to read, and it is largely because of Mrs. Vlasis. Since kindergarten, she has recommended books that sparked their interests and expanded their imaginations. Now that they are in middle school, she is still talking to them about books and nudging them towards authors and genres that are new to them, from Dr. Seuss to Captain Underpants to The Hunger Games. They will be readers for life, and I’m grateful to Mrs. Vlasis for helping to make that happen.” – Parent of 2 Middle School Students

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?

Mrs. Vlasis serves on the school leadership team. She has been at the school for many years, and has a strong understanding of the school vision and philosophy. She helps the leadership team to stay the course when it comes to the big picture. She is instrumental in the writing of the school improvement plan, and serves as chair of several committees. In the words of the Principal, “Charlotte is a valued member of our leadership team and our whole entire school. Her expertise

holds us together in the media department, professional development, grant writing, and mentoring of new/old teachers.”

Although she has an official role in leadership, she is a natural leader among her peers. The teachers trust her and come to her for advice and support. In a building that values shared leadership, her opinion is highly regarded by all. Her skills at facilitating professional dialogue are extremely helpful in managing group decisions and conflict. A former principal observed, “Her ability to effectively facilitate communication between administration and teachers is invaluable in addressing curricular concerns and student needs.”

Mrs. Vlasis has been instrumental in building our professional learning community outside of the school building. She is one of the lead librarians for the entire school district, often leading professional development for other librarians. She has led Critical Friends groups and hosted book clubs for the faculty at her home. She has written grants that support adult learning, as well as one to host an after-school book club for elementary students. Her extensive work in curriculum and her expertise in collaborative planning have been recognized, within and outside of our state, as she has presented at National Conferences and at several school and district in-service programs.

Charlotte’s impact goes beyond the walls of this school. A former CSLA parent had this to say: “Mrs. Vlasis impacted my daughter by instilling the love of literature, reading, and discussing books in seminars. She is one of the reasons my daughter is a 1st grade teacher today.”

In crafting this nomination, many colleagues, students, and parents worked together to try to paint a picture of why we love our librarian. We found that it was hard not to ask for her advice since she is really great at editing this type of writing. However, we wanted this to be a surprise. For that reason, we don’t have a resume-type list of her positions and accomplishments. I’m sure it is a lengthy and impressive list. However, the following snapshot was observed by a CSLA teacher recently. We feel that it speaks volumes about Charlotte Vlasis:

Today as I was leaving the library, Charlotte was sitting at the circulation computer near the door to the library. The kindergartners were heading by the library going to related arts. As one little guy went past the library door, he yelled in, "Hello, Mrs. Glasses!" I thought it was cute how he had morphed her name as only a new kindergarten student can. Then, as I thought about it more, I thought, "Wow. That's pretty profound." More than most librarians I've worked with, our Mrs. Vlasis wears glasses that we all need to borrow at times. She sees how technology has changed her profession and has embraced it. She sees the thousands of books in our library and knows where to find just the right one to fit your unit of study. She sees each student, kindergartners and eighth graders alike, as someone who has the potential to learn some pretty neat stuff through research. She sees the book that a particular student needs to read to hook them into reading. She sees how learning can change a student's course in life. What a gift! What sharp vision we get from "Mrs. Glasses."