

# DECEMBER 2025 TEACHERS of EXCELLENCE®

Recognizing Excellence in Teaching Through Dedication, Compassion & Knowledge

## PROFILE

LAKE COUNTY

### WHY TEACHING IS MORE THAN A DAY JOB:

"I love that I get the chance to know my students in a self-contained classroom," Lynn Kasperan says. "They share stories with me, and I share stories with them. My hope is that they learn to build on their strengths and improve upon the things that are hard for them. We often say: 'I haven't mastered this ... yet!' Another saying we use is 'We all make mistakes, but the important thing is we learn to fix them!'" Kasperan earned her bachelor's degree from St. Mary's College in Notre Dame and her master's degree from Purdue University Northwest. She received extra training from Governors State University to become a reading specialist. Kasperan has been teaching for 36 years.

### FAVORITE PART OF TEACHING:

"I love when a student who is a reluctant reader, writer or problem solver in math finally figures out a concept, laughs at something funny in a story or smiles as they are sharing a story they've written," Kasperan says. "These moments are what make all the extra hours we all put in worth the effort. It is also impactful when a parent sends you a note thanking you for all your efforts."

### WHY TEACHING IS MORE THAN A DAY JOB:

"As a teacher, I appreciate that we all get a new start at the beginning of each day," Aaron Kennedy says. "I also enjoy the challenges and opportunities that every new year brings. Students today have a lot of things grabbing their attention, and so I really like the pressure of needing to capture and engage kids with creativity and honesty. It's not easy being a role model for young people, but I receive tons of inspiration and encouragement from students and their families. Education is a very demanding field, but I am motivated by all the support that is available." Kennedy began his professional career as a volunteer coordinator with Catholic Charities and became a teacher through the Transition to Teaching program at Calumet College of St. Joseph. He has taught elementary students for 10 years. He lives in Crown Point with his family.

### FAVORITE PART OF TEACHING:

Kennedy says each school day brings uniquely wonderful moments such as when he transforms his classroom to match a lesson plan and watching students thrive beyond the classroom. "One year I turned a whole corner of the classroom into a realistic bat cave. Kids really enjoy those unusual classroom experiences. Additionally, I've been invited to watch students in recreational sports, like hockey and baseball, on the weekends. It's an honor to be included in those events. I still have students from prior years visit and bring little gifts or encouragement. Those things stick with me."

PORTER COUNTY

### WHY TEACHING IS MORE THAN A DAY JOB:

"I enjoy making memories every year with my students," Troy Yeager says. "I love the connections we build and watching students discover their passions while growing into the best versions of themselves. There's nothing quite like hearing from former students. A letter in the mail, an email out of the blue, an invitation to an open house or being asked to write a recommendation all remind me of why I do this. And if they remember a few lessons about history and words of wisdom along the way, well, that's a lovely bonus." A native of Marion, Ind., Yeager graduated with honors from Purdue University in 2013. He co-directs and leads his school's drama club and coaches Academic Super Bowl.

### FAVORITE PART OF TEACHING:

"I keep a 'Dead Poets Society' movie poster in my classroom, a quiet reminder of why I became a teacher," Yeager says. "One year, a handful of students noticed it, so they decided to watch the film on their own but kept it to themselves. On the last day of school during my final class of the year, one student said: 'We would like to say something to you.' One by one they began standing on their desks and saying, 'Oh Captain, my captain.' Yes, there were tears from everyone. And it remains one of the many unforgettable moments of my career among the many wonderful productions we have done in the school's drama club. I cherish those memories."

### WHY TEACHING IS MORE THAN A DAY JOB:

"I love helping students grow by encouraging them to challenge themselves and try new things," Elizabeth Laba says. "Their questions inspire me to keep learning right alongside them. Getting to know my students – their goals, interests and plans – is one of the best parts of teaching, and I love finding ways to help them prepare for whatever comes next. One of the things I appreciate most about teaching science is that everyone can find something they're good at. Some students are great at working with their hands in the lab, others in math or explaining concepts and some have a talent for visualizing and drawing models. We celebrate our strengths (even big kids like stickers) and work hard to keep improving together." Laba earned her bachelor's degree in engineering and master's degree in education from Valparaiso University. She has taught in Northwest Indiana for 22 years and lives in Union Township with her husband, Tim, and their three children.

### FAVORITE TEACHING MEMORY:

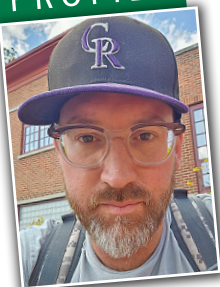
"One of my favorite parts of teaching is hearing from former students about how well our school prepared them for whatever they move on to after high school," Laba says. "I love getting emails from students in which they show off high scores on their college chemistry exams or messages from those who notice something in their daily lives that reminds them of our class. It's incredibly rewarding to see them continue to feel excited about science after they've left high school."

## PROFILE



**TROY YEAGER,**  
Seventh Grade  
Social Studies  
Benjamin Franklin  
Middle School,  
Valparaiso

## PROFILE



**AARON KENNEDY,**  
Fourth Grade  
Red Cedars  
Elementary School,  
Cedar Lake

## PROFILE



**ELIZABETH LABA,**  
Science  
Wheeler High  
School, Valparaiso



*"Teachers provide a foundation for life as we know it. Without them there would be no doctors, police officers, authors, scientists, engineers ... virtually every vocation. We appreciate and acknowledge their commitment to making our world a better place."*

Best Regards,  
*Kenneth J. Allen*



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