

2019-2020 H. William Christ Educator Prize Winner
Diana O'Connor



Diana O'Connor had the good fortune to be part of the team that opened the first all-girls public school in Texas in August 2004, Irma Lerma Rangel Young Women's Leadership School, a magnet school in the Dallas Independent School District (DISD). As Teacher Librarian for 6th-12th grade students at Rangel, she directly supports the school wide pre-AP and AP curriculum by teaching information literacy, research, and digital citizenship so that students transition smoothly to the expectations of college level inquiry and analysis. Prior to becoming a librarian, Diana taught hearing impaired adolescents with multiple disabilities, was a special education resource teacher, and taught 1st and 1st-2nd multi-grade classes, all in the Dallas ISD. She has been a frequent presenter at NCGS, American Library Association, and

Texas Library Association conferences.

As Rangel grew from the ground up, Diana became accustomed to wearing many hats with the focus of expanding learning opportunities beyond the classroom for her mostly first-generation college bound students. In conjunction with Young Women's Preparatory Network (YWPN), the non-profit partner of Rangel and its eight all-girls public schools across Texas, Diana developed summer camps for all seven grades at her school. From 2005-2015, she administered separate STEM camps for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, and college readiness camps at various north Texas universities for high school students. Diana continues to direct Each One Reach One, a summer program that supports the school's pillar of service leadership by taking students on a deep dive into community service across Dallas. She also worked with Rangel's College Bound Advisor to implement annual transition programming for graduating seniors and their parents to prepare for their smooth transition to college, while alleviating "summer melt."

As part of her philosophy that teaching must extend beyond the realm of databases and bibliography, Diana worked with YWPN to create Respect Starts Here, a curriculum designed to build skills of listening, speaking, and understanding as we embrace our differences with empathy. Starting in 2015, lessons tackled tough topics about bias, intolerance, systemic discrimination, and hate to bring the conversations into the classroom through current events, videos, novel studies, and students' own experiences. Respect Starts Here required teachers to be trained about implicit bias, privilege, and

learning how to create safe spaces for discussion. She is most proud that Respect Starts Here helped empower Rangel students to develop campus organizations built around the mission of the program. Safe Space is one example of a student-led organization that trains teachers to be aware of some of the issues that students face at school: mental health, microaggressions in the classroom, and bullying. It provides professional development not only at Rangel, but also across the DISD to other campuses.

Diana brought the NEST curriculum on Human Trafficking to Rangel as part of an outreach pilot program, integrating the lessons into sophomore advisory classes. She worked with the NEST development team to coordinate Rangel students as panelists at the Southern Methodist University Youth Forum on Human Trafficking in 2016 and 2017. In an effort to widen the scope of how the library provides resources to students, Diana has instituted a monthly speaker series, featuring presentations from research scientists, physicians and medical school students, lawyers and law school professors, experts on immigrant rights, authors, and community activists. She is co-coach of Rangel's Academic Decathlon and Pentathlon teams.

Since 2009, Diana has been a board member of the Dallas non-profit, 29 Pieces, where she has worked to promote its mission of using art as a medium for monumental social change. Rangel students have participated in several 29 Pieces lessons, including having 6th graders address the mayor and city council about homeless issues, creating art for the city-wide Dallas LOVE Project, Dallas Teachers Speak, and Respect projects, and having the art displayed in venues across the city.

Diana received her B.S. in Deaf Education from Southern Methodist University, her M.S. in Special Education from the University of Texas at Dallas, and her M.S. in Library Science from Texas Woman's University.