

Teacher Who Helped Open ACPS' Newest School Named Teacher of the Year

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A physical education teacher who helped open Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School and brought the circus to ACPS has been named 2019 ACPS Teacher of the Year.

April Rodgers, who was part of the team selected to pull together programming for ACPS' newest school last fall, was surprised by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., who made the announcement in front of her students on Thursday morning.

“As the first physical education teacher at Ferdinand T. Day, Ms. Rodgers is a true trailblazer and example for us all in her commitment to go above and beyond for each and every one of her students every day. She is an icon for the school and is already helping us make history,” Dr. Hutchings said.

Twelve years ago, Rodgers brought the concept of the circus to physical education classes in ACPS, teaching it at John Adams and James K. Polk elementary schools and now to the 450 students at Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School. She purposefully integrates circus content to keep students active, socially and emotionally engaged, and to instill a sense of confidence in them.

“Physical activity is the hook to get kids to think about things that are so much more important than the basketball or the soccer ball or the juggling balls — it’s to think about, ‘How do I become a good human being?’ And exercise is part of us being good human beings. But learning to take a breath is sometimes part of learning to be a good human being — and learning to try again and learning to take risks. All of that is part of being a good human being,” said Rodgers, who is also the Washington Post Outstanding Teacher of the Year finalist for ACPS.



As a founding staff member of Ferdinand T. Day, Rodgers played a key role in bringing the new school to life. She was instrumental in creating school-wide master schedules and in the planning and organizing of the school’s dedication ceremony.

She organized Ferdinand T. Day’s first Turkey Trot, which brought students and parents together with neighbors and local organizations to help students work

towards beating their personal best. She obtained a \$10,000 grant from RunningBrooke to incorporate equipment in the the school that supports brain research, connecting movement with learning. Grant materials included Imagination Playground equipment — life-sized building blocks that enable students to move while learning — and a series of six stationary bikes where students can ride while they read books. She has also worked to support Safe Routes to School to ensure a safe environment for walkers, bikers and drivers.

Rodgers also collaborates with teachers to integrate cross-curricular content into her PE classes. Students can often be found skip counting while simultaneously improving their cardiovascular endurance by jumping on a trampoline or conquering a prepositional obstacle course while working on upper-body muscular endurance, core strength and balance.

Rodgers is described as an innovator, advocate and leader by her principal, colleagues and students.

“I think Ms. Rodgers should be Teacher of the Year because she encourages us to do things that we think are impossible and no one can do, but she encourages us and we do it.” — Nora, grade five

“Ms. Rodgers provides a safe, creative and encouraging environment for students to learn skills, grow character and be recognized for her efforts.” — Parent

“I think Ms. Rodgers should be teacher of the year because 1) She handles kids well. 2) She’s lots of fun. 3) She teaches us a lot. 4) She’s a great teacher. Hopefully you’ll consider making Ms. Rodgers teacher of the year now.” — Jayden, grade four

“Despite her status as a rockstar teacher, she has no trouble playing a support role with her peers and in her school if it behooves the students in some way. Whether she is hurriedly trailing a microphone and rolling up the cord during a presentation or spending weekend hours ensuring an equipment order is done correctly, she repeatedly demonstrates a team-first attitude, which makes her a pleasure to work with.” — Mike Humphreys, ACPS Instructional Specialist

“She makes magic happen and kids are always thrilled to go to PE. You can hear laughter often from the gym. The students never know what to expect in PE because it’s always something different and fresh.” — PTA