

## 2018 Big Apple Award Finalists in District 26

### **Grace Ballas, Second Grade Teacher, P.S. 159**

Grace Ballas is a second grade teacher at P.S 159. She is celebrating 19 years of teaching where she has worked as a Reading Specialist, served as an Academic Intervention Coordinator, and has taught first and second grade. At P.S. 159, she was a part of the Learning Partners Team, which was an initiative put together by former Chancellor Farina bolstering collaboration and sharing best practices with partner schools. She has been a grade leader, member of the Consultation Committee, the Literacy Liaison Team, and the Social and Emotional Learning Team. She believes that her enthusiasm, strong work ethic, dedication, love of children, and belief that all children can learn distinguish her as an educator. She is most proud of the success of her students year after year, when more than 90% of her second graders leave her classroom reading above grade level. Her strong background in literacy, extensive training in Readers and Writers Workshop, data-driven instruction, and strong collaboration with parents contribute to that success. In her classroom, she fosters a love of learning and students are intellectually-engaged and challenged. It's a safe, nurturing, and student-centered environment where the children are encouraged to be active learners, critical thinkers, and risk takers. They are active participants where they hold their own student-led conferences and confer with other peers on particular skills. Her students are celebrated with wall to wall displays of their work containing rubric-based teacher and peer feedback. She strives to teach her students independence, responsibility, and social emotional life skills. Her goal as an educator has always been to instill in her students a love of learning. Mrs. Ballas strongly believes that "KNOWLEDGE IS POWER" and equips her students with a strong, well-rounded foundation and the necessary tools to become college and career ready!

### **Jessica Ana Kim-Wong, Third Grade Teacher, P.S. 173Q**

Jessica Wong is a third grade teacher at P.S. 173Q in Fresh Meadows. Growing up in Paraguay, Mrs. Wong witnessed poverty first-hand. Seeing children walking barefoot and selling fruits on the streets every morning, she quickly learned that not every child had the opportunity to attend school. This injustice shaped her belief that all children deserve a quality education despite their backgrounds. During her 8 years of teaching, Mrs. Wong has worked with various student populations in Boston, Hempstead, and New York City. She designed curricula to meet the diverse needs of her students, shared with colleagues ways to integrate vocabulary instruction in the classroom, facilitated study groups in classroom management and behavior strategies, and attended various professional learning sessions to build her teaching repertoire. Currently, she is the Reading Rescue Coordinator at her school, where she provides support to tutors who work with struggling readers. Outside of teaching, she enjoys spending time with her family and closest friends, particularly exploring cities with good food.

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### **Melissa Niedert, Second Grade Teacher, P.S. 18**

Melissa Niedert has been teaching at P.S. 18Q Winchester School for 12 years. She currently teaches second grade in an ICT classroom, and also spent many years teaching third grade. Mrs. Niedert knew from a young age that teaching would be her career choice and was inspired by her mother, a special education teacher. She is the Data Specialist at her school and spends time analyzing the data and determining next steps. Mrs. Niedert loves all subjects, but her true passion is inspiring students to love mathematics. She spends a great deal of time planning out new and exciting ways for her students to learn math concepts. Mrs. Niedert is a math lead in her school and is proud to be working on a school initiative to foster students learning through the use of games and routines in the classroom. She is a member of variety of school committees and has worked on community service projects such as Alex's Lemonade Stand where she has helped raise over \$2,000 to fight childhood cancer.

### **Pat Ryan, Second Grade Teacher, P.S. 133Q**

Pat Ryan is proud to be a second-grade teacher at P.S. 133Q. She has also taught fourth grade and science. Each day she is continually inspired by her students. Ms. Ryan is dedicated towards educating and creating happy, responsible individuals by sparking their interest and engaging them in innovative learning each day. Her love and respect for the environment is instilled in her classroom allowing students to participate in positive learning experiences such as creating and cultivating a class garden, learning about water and our other natural resources, the need to conserve and protect them. It influences students' ideas and impacts the choices they will make in life. Each year her students explore their role in protecting the environment by learning about New York City's water supply system. Students enter the DEP's citywide Art and Poetry Contest to share what they have learned through their poetry with the New York City school community. Over the years, she has had numerous students winning the DEP Poetry Contest as Water Ambassadors. As a fourth-grade teacher, she led Project WISE (water inspired science education) working cooperatively in an upstate school partnership to increase the communication and understanding about their mutual roles and responsibility in protecting the New York City's water supply system. Ms. Ryan has been a grant recipient of Green Connections and the Watershed Agricultural Council. She also received the Dr. Eugene Ezersky Outstanding Environmental Education Award from the Environmental Education Advisory Council. She has been a member of the Public Education Advisory Group for the Catskill Watershed Corporation Grant Committee since 2004. Currently she is a member of the PS 133Q Leadership team, a participant in the District 26 Teacher Team Cohort and a liaison for Teachers College Reading and Writing Project for her second grade team. She is dedicated to instilling a love of learning while providing an environment that stimulates and engages her students to stretch their boundaries, take risks within a safe environment while developing their critical thinking skills to help them reach their potential. One of her passions is teaching students about science, nature and creating learning experiences they will always treasure.