

 OUTSTANDING
EDUCATOR

Andrew Farrar



For Andrew Farrar, teaching has always been more than a career. Growing up in a family of educators, the profession felt familiar, but it was his second-grade teacher, Mary Lou Arnston, who truly inspired his lifelong calling. More than an educator, Mrs. Arnston became a mentor and friend who modeled what it means to care deeply, laugh loudly, and push students to become their best selves. Her influence continues to shape Andrew's classroom every day.

Now in his 22nd year of teaching, Andrew is a first-grade teacher in the Oconomowoc Area School District. At the heart of his teaching philosophy is connection. By taking the time to learn each student's interests, likes, and dislikes, Andrew ensures every child feels seen and valued. Humor plays an important role as well, with jokes, silly voices, and lighthearted moments that build trust and joy. When students feel safe enough to laugh, they are more willing to take risks, engage deeply, and grow together as a classroom community.

Creativity and intentional practice guide Andrew's instructional approach. One of his most effective strategies is "Talk Partners," a structured system that pairs students with different classmates every other week, helping them learn to communicate confidently with every peer. Before answering questions or beginning tasks, students talk through their thinking with their partner, reducing anxiety, ensuring full participation, and strengthening understanding before writing. Paired with formative assessment strategies such as exit tickets and observation, this approach allows Andrew to make immediate instructional adjustments, keeping the focus on mastery rather than simply moving through material.

Family is central to what motivates Andrew, from the unwavering support of loved ones to the pride he feels watching his adult children succeed. He is also inspired daily by his colleagues at Summit Elementary, whom he describes as some of the best educators he has ever had the privilege to work alongside.

Looking back, Andrew is especially proud of the lasting impact he has made on approximately 440 students, helping spark confidence, curiosity, and growth through meaningful connection. Outside the classroom, he continues to support students through his involvement in Best Buddies, Book Art Club, and Drama Club.

When asked about receiving the Outstanding Educator Award, Andrew describes the moment as deeply humbling. "Recognition is never the goal. The real reward is watching a student finally grasp a difficult concept or seeing them grow in confidence. It is my honor every day to be a teacher."

For Andrew, student success cannot be measured by a single benchmark. Engagement, independence, bravery, and kindness are the true indicators. Above all, he hopes his students leave his classroom knowing how to be kind, honest, brave, and willing to laugh at themselves. Lessons that last far beyond the school day.