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First-year Schuler teacher nominated for prestigious award

Written by [Rose Sanchez](#)



First-year Schuler School teacher Alisha Sims is the Prairie Rose School Division's (PRSD) nominee for the prestigious Edwin Parr Teacher award.

Sims started teaching at the school last fall filling a one-year maternity position. It is her first teaching role, having graduated from the University of Lethbridge with a Bachelors in Education, majoring in English. It's fitting for Sims, whose previous career spanned more than 20 years as a journalist before she decided to return to university as a mature student and earn her education degree.

"First-year teachers know about this award. It is such an honour," she says about her nomination. She was interviewed by PRSD board of trustees and evaluated by senior administration before her name was submitted. Now she will be interviewed by the Zone 6 Alberta School Board Association (ASBA) award selection committee before she finds out if she will be the award recipient later in the spring.

"Just being nominated is such an honour," adds Sims, who says she feels like she is being recognized for simply doing her job.

"This is what I want to do," she adds about teaching. "Sometimes it's scary switching careers, but it's moments like this when I know I did the right thing. It helps validate that this was supposed to be."

Nominees for the Edwin Parr award are evaluated on their knowledge of learning styles and their skills in using a variety of instructional and student evaluation methods; diagnosing the knowledge and/or skill of students for a given set of instructional objectives; assisting students to develop a positive self-concept along with their involvement in professional development; extra-curricular and community activities; and their interpersonal skills with students.

“Ms. Sims is an excellent candidate to represent Prairie Rose for the 2017 Edwin Parr award,” says Board Chair Stuart Angle. “She has done so many extraordinary things with her students and parents. It is wonderful to see someone pursue a career passion as an older student and excel at it. Alisha’s passion for teaching is obvious and contagious.”

Sims is responsible for the One School, One Book literacy initiative in Schuler School that took place earlier this year.

“It’s very well deserved,” says Jason Duchscherer, Schuler School principal, about the award nomination. “She is doing a tremendous job.”

He cites examples of Sims’ extra work such as building a website with her English students, her use of social media especially Twitter, and the students using drones in their studies.

“She has a tremendous understanding of the program of studies. She draws what she learns into real-world situations.”

Duchscherer offers the example of Sims asking her Grade 3/4 students how they used Math on the the weekend every Monday morning.

“The kids just love being around her. She is energetic and she gets kids. She knows how to develop relationships with people,” adds Duchscherer.

He is appreciative of Sims being recognized with the Edwin Parr award nomination as it “recognizes the hard work, effort and time” she is putting in to her position.

Sims says she can be a great teacher at Schuler School because of the network of support that is in place.

“I have a such a great school to cut my teeth as a first-year teacher,” she says, adding she has great students, supportive parents and fellow staff members and a principal who allows her to try new initiatives. She never feels like she is held back.

“If you want to dream really big, they don’t discourage that ... I can’t say enough about having (a central office) administration — even at a board level — how supportive everyone is. The kids absolutely amaze me as well.”

She was invited back to the University of Lethbridge in December to speak to post-secondary education students who are in their third professional teaching semester.

“I told them not to count rural schools out,” she says. “I never imagined I would be teaching in a school of less than 60 students in a town with no coffee shop. It’s absolutely amazing. To be able to experiment. With a small rural school there are opportunities there, you can do so many things because you have such small class sizes. I never imagined myself as a science teacher or a math teacher, but I’m really enjoying the science. The science stuff we do is so hands on and interesting.”

The biggest challenge Sims has faced as a first-year teacher is building up her materials in the units, and the time that takes, just so she can step in front of the students and teach. That doesn’t even include time needed for marking and extra-curricular involvement. Sims likens it to a play.

Most people don’t understand the “rehearsing” that takes place, they just see the finished production on the stage.

“I’ve accepted I will never have my to-do list done,” she adds, but seems content acknowledging that.

Each school division in Zone 6 nominates one teacher for the Edwin Parr Award each year. Zone nominees are honoured in May at the Zone 6 Edwin Parr Banquet in Taber with the official awards presentation at the fall ASBA meeting in November. The winner from each zone receives a gold

watch and framed certificate.

Zone 6 encompasses all of southern Alberta including Prairie Rose School Division No. 8; Grasslands Regional Division No. 6; Medicine Hat School District No. 76; Medicine Hat Catholic Schools Regional Division No. 20; Horizon School Division No. 67; Palliser Regional Division No. 26; Westwind School Division No. 74; Livingstone Range School Division No. 68; Lethbridge School District No. 51 and Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 4.

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