

HERALD

HEAD of the CLASS

LONG ISLAND TEACHER AWARDS

**Elementary School
WINNER**


Nancy Aquino
Steele Elementary School
2nd Grade

"I always had very engaging teachers, and I remembered a lot about how they made me feel, and I really try to think about that a lot when I'm teaching and I'm interacting with kids."

Over the course of her 24-year teaching career, Steele Elementary School 2nd grade teacher Nancy Aquino has positively impacted the lives of many students, hoping to make the same impression many of her teachers did when she was growing up. "I always had very engaging teachers, and I remembered a lot of how they made me feel, and I really try to think about that when I'm teaching and I'm interacting with kids," Aquino says. "I really try to think of it from their perspective, and how I remember how I felt when I was in school. My biggest thing is that they feel comfortable with me, and then the learning happens."

Like many teachers, Aquino had a massive challenge to overcome in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. While students and teachers alike had to adapt to virtual and hybrid learning, Aquino noticed early on that her class was concerned with one thing in particular. "The first thing they asked when we were on Google Meet, they were like, 'Well, how are we going to use our Aquino Bucks?'"

Aquino's reward system for the children was of paramount importance to the children. All the kids wanted to know: "What does our classroom look like? Is everything okay?" In order to make sure her students felt a sense of normalcy during a time where life was anything but, Aquino set about crafting special moments and experiences for them. "They'd ask, 'What happened with the leprechaun tracks, and did the leprechaun come?' All these things," she says. "I was able to go into the classroom and put pictures and send them the leprechaun didn't come. I went back to school and went to the store, and then in June when it got a little bit better, I went to each kid's house, and I put a sign on the lawn with a picture with the kids and all the work they had done."

Teaching via computer is far from ideal, as most teachers will agree, and so is learning. Aquino says that both her students and their parents adapted well during the pandemic. "They were very understanding and flexible and supportive, and honestly they made me feel better," she says. "The kids every day when you log on, and see their faces, that it felt a little bit normal just to see them. We got through it all together."

To this day, Aquino understands the importance of a great elementary school teacher, as she still keeps in touch with some of the teachers from her childhood. "I was in touch with my 4th grade teacher as he passed away last year. I went to his wake and everything, and I just found my 3rd grade teacher, who is a mayor in Florida. I think she just

retired as a mayor. I was able to find her on Facebook, I just left a message. I wanted to, as an adult, be able to tell them how they impacted me, and that now I've been teaching 24 years, it was really emotional for me. I was excited to find them."

One of Aquino's former students, Jasmine Philibert, 22, recently reconnected with her by chance. "When I first moved to Long Island in 2004, I recall being nervous to start at a new school where no one knew me," says Philibert. "I recently had the pleasure of running into Mrs. Aquino, 17 years later. During our conversation, she told me the same things she used to tell me as a child; that I am smart, beautiful, and will do amazing things. That experience further confirmed how much she truly cared for all of her students. I am so proud to have had Mrs. Aquino as my kindergarten teacher."



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