

Donna M. Varma

Rio Vista Elementary School

2016 Rodel Exemplary Teacher Finalist

Engaging students

“ I think the key to active engagement is for students to take ownership of their learning. This can be done by first setting goals with the student and then having the student monitor and evaluate his or her progress. I think it's important to recognize and provide feedback to students for genuine effort. It is also equally important to employ several different types of engagement strategies into delivery of instruction. This allows learning to be energetic, collaborative, and purposeful.

Learning from a mentor

“ My first mentor, Margie Hervert, taught me that when planning my lessons, I need to know first and foremost what I want my students to know by the end of the lesson. I need to ensure that I align my lessons and assessments to that objective, and I must communicate these expectations to my students. Finally, I need to check for understanding and misconceptions along the way. I have successfully used this process every day of my teaching career.

A tip for new teachers

“ One tip I would give a new teacher is to really think about a classroom management system. Good systems allow the classroom to run smoothly, so that the teacher can successfully teach. There should be a procedure for everything from how a student comes and goes from the classroom, to how and when the student speaks, sits and moves about the classroom. There should be a set area and procedure for all supplies and resources. Finally, procedures should be followed consistently and reviewed often.



Donna M. Varma
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Amphitheater Public Schools

Third grade

Experience: Eleven years in education including four years as a third-grade teacher, two years as fifth-grade teacher, and five years as a fourth-grade teacher; currently serving as a member of the Student Study Leadership Team, the No Excuses University Leadership Team, and grade-level facilitator for the Response to Intervention Team; formerly spent over thirteen years working in the health finance industry

Degrees: B.A. in Health Care Finance from University of Phoenix; M.Ed. in Elementary Education; ESL Full Endorsement; currently pursuing a Reading Endorsement

The Rodel Exemplary Teacher Initiative honors extraordinary teachers and asks that they each mentor high-potential student teachers.

What sets the program apart from typical student teaching programs is that mentor teachers are selected based on their outstanding student achievement in high-need schools, their ability to mentor new teachers, and the recommendation of their principals and Rodel's observation team. This ensures that student teachers are learning from the best. In addition, Rodel provides further training and support to both mentors and student teachers to assure Promising Student Teacher Graduates start their careers as outstanding educators.

Since 2004, 167 Rodel Exemplary Teachers have been named and more than 650 Rodel Promising Student Teachers have been mentored.

The 2016 Rodel Exemplary Teachers will be announced on November 29 at www.rodelaz.org.