



Meet Mrs. Stacey Smith

She was born and raised in a small suburban town outside of Chicago and is the youngest of four children. When her parents retired, they moved to Florida to be closer to her grandmother. As a teenager, she was not happy to move away from all of her family and friends, however, within a few months, she met her husband, Shawn. "We met in high school and have been together ever since." This July,

they will be celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary! Together, they had two boys, Michael (28) and Charlie (24), and a daughter, Alyssa (20). "My family means the world to me, and I love every aspect of being a mom." Last year, she embarked on a new chapter when the latest member of the Smith Family, Zella Rose, arrived and made her a grandma. When not teaching, she enjoys boating, kayaking, traveling, and spending time with her family.

What is your teaching philosophy?

Tell me, and I forget. Teach me, and I remember. Involve me, and I learn. ~ Benjamin Franklin

As a teacher, I have an enormous responsibility to help develop and inspire the next generation's love of learning. My job is not only to teach academics but to guide them to become a lifelong learner. I encourage my students to always wonder and ask questions. I want to instill the love of learning and build a foundation for them to acquire knowledge to reach their full potential intrinsically. I want to inspire them to actively learn by reading, learning, and questioning their interests. I want to provide a safe and positive environment in which they know they are supported to grow and persevere if they fail.

What is the most gratifying aspect of teaching? Teaching Kindergarten has so many gratifying moments. When a student comes to our

Kindergarten program, they are so young. Many are just learning to write their names or sound out words; however, when they leave Kindergarten, they are reading and writing. They grow so much in such a short amount of time. Each year, I reflect on how much they have changed, entering as wide-eyed preschoolers experiencing the cafeteria for the first time, then leaving ready to conquer 1st grade without a hitch. They learn to speak in front of a group, perform in front of an audience, read a book, write a story, and so much more. They never cease to amaze me, which is the most gratifying aspect of teaching kindergarten.

What is my greatest personal achievement as a teacher? It is hard to select just one personal achievement. For me, the littlest things always make the most impact. I love when students come to my classroom to share essential details of their lives. I love the pictures and notes they send my way. All these little things let me know I achieved my goal of making a positive difference in their lives.

Why did I choose Unity School? First, I had heard so many beautiful stories about Unity School that I had to see what all the hype was about. From the moment I stepped on campus, I could tell Unity was an extraordinary place. I could feel the Lessons in Living program at work throughout the campus. Everyone was so happy and friendly. I remember watching Ms. Judith, the LnL director, teaching a preschool lesson. She had all the students engaged with her kind spirit. She was emanating the essence of what Unity School was all about. I met many incredible mentors that week and instantly knew I wanted to teach here. It is one thing for a school to have a philosophy; it is quite another for the school to live it wholeheartedly, as my mentors did. I could not wait to be a part of such a unique place.

What makes the Unity program unique? Unity School is unique because teachers are encouraged to teach to the whole child's needs. We don't teach to a specific test or standard. We are encouraged to take the curriculum and develop it to meet the needs of our students. Significant learning occurs when teachers are allowed the freedom and creativity to teach outside of a test. We aren't limited to the pages of a book, either. We can bring the curriculum alive through field trips, discovery days, and cross-curricular activities.

What is your background and experience? I always knew I wanted to help others. I worked part-time in an elementary school aftercare program while attending college. I took a few years off to have my children and eventually graduated Summa Cum Laude from FAU with a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Ed. In 2008, Unity hired me as a Montessori teacher. While teaching, I attained my Montessori degree through NAMC. I worked in our preschool for four years. Then, when a Kindergarten teacher position arose, I was excited and honored to be asked to be a member of the elementary team. My Montessori background aids our Kindergarten students' transition to a regular classroom. Unity has been my home away from home for over 15 years.