

people! Last year when I was in a different kindergarten room a little girl asked me my name and I told her, 'Nancy.' She thought for a minute with her finger to her lips and said, 'Oh, like Nancy Pelosi!'"

#### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"I think it's the connections and the relationships that I have developed with building staff and my AEA colleagues."

#### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"I have always been incredibly fortunate to work with amazing AEA colleagues. We created our own little support system and helped each other get through challenging times and enjoyed celebrating the "fun stuff". I have also worked with so many dedicated and caring LEA staff, teachers, associates, and administrators.

I also have appreciated the opportunities that I have had over the years to develop my skills - mediation training, being part of the CISM team, working as a behavior coach, and teaching Youth Mental Health First Aid. These are just a few that come to mind."

#### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Stimulating.** There were challenges every day but each day was different so I never got bored. Also, there were always a lot of interesting professional learning opportunities offered through Grant Wood AEA that I could take advantage of."

#### **JILL WEIGEL**

"I started in February, 1997 as a School Social Worker. I was assigned to Midland (four buildings), Olin (one building) and Linn Mar (two buildings). At that time, I provided direct service to 52 students on IEPs, as well as provided social work support to families. I also consulted with teachers around how to support students in classrooms. Over time, the SSW role has changed dramatically to move away from direct service. My individual work and role also changed in that I became the GWAEA Facilitator, Associate Regional Administrator and now a Regional Administrator."

#### **Are there any interesting stories you'd like to share from school districts in which you've worked or within the AEA?**

"I've had so many interesting stories! I remember cows blocking the road on our way to Midland, and being asked to work with students in an old abandoned shower/locker room in the basement at Olin (I

refused and chose the hallway upstairs instead). I worked as a building rep at Cedar Rapids Washington for a number of years and loved my work there - and had many fun stories working with the staff and students in that building. It is strange to look back on your career and to think about how quickly it all seems to have gone!"

#### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"I am most proud of helping to build the SEBH structures currently in place at the agency. When I was first assigned to SEBH work in 2011-12, I was assigned as the management link to two staff - one Challenging Behavior team member (Lindsey Stangeland) and one PBIS Coordinator (Tammy Beener). There was also a new SEBT (Special Ed Behavior Team) pilot that was connected to a different manager. During the 2012-13 year, I became the link to the SEBT (now called Behavior Coaches) and we began collaborating with all three teams and working to build a system of support. We went from six team members to 12 team members during my eight years with that team, and all of the Behavior PL was developed that continues to this day (we started with almost none). We met regularly with the Autism team (ABC Planning) and worked to understand the messages and professional learning that each group was providing to our LEAs at the time. In the areas where there were discrepancies, we worked together to align our messages and coaching.

In addition to SEBH, I am also proud of the work that I have done in Mediation. I have been a Mediator at GWAEA since 2014-15. During that time, we have come to consensus in all of our mediations except for one. I have worked with many great people in this work, including my co-mediators Paul Kiburz, Jill Ries, Janel Lesan, Danielle Donnelly and Tim Salmon. Mediation has been very rewarding in that you are coming to the table with two parties who are at very different places and working to bring them to agreement so they can move forward. I really enjoy it!

I also cannot overlook the CISM team that I have been fortunate to be a management link to for nine years (four years in the past and five years most currently). "Team Awesome" is made up of so many dedicated professionals who give of themselves every time we are called out to support a crisis. This is above and beyond their 'normal work' and therefore these team members are so dedicated to helping provide stability in traumatic times. Our leadership team is so amazing and supportive of one another and I am so

grateful to have been a part of building this team and our shared leadership capacity."

#### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"I know it is cliché, but the PEOPLE! No matter my role or the work I am doing, I am always surrounded by passionate, caring and brilliant people. That has been amazing!"

#### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Fulfilling.** As I look back, I was given so many opportunities to help me learn and grow, and I appreciated them all!"

#### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"GWAEA has been an incredible place to work. There are so many opportunities and possibilities. I have personally been assigned to eight different districts and had nine different supervisors through the years. As a manager, I have been linked to the Hearing group, the CPI trainers, the Challenging Behavior Support Team, PBIS, Safe and Supportive Schools grant, SEBH Coaches, School Social Workers, TCIT-U, SEE-KS, and Mediation. There are always new paths to take if you are interested - and I have tried several!"



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Grant Wood AEA's

# Retirement Reflections 2023

#### **MICHELLE BENDICKSON**

"I started at Grant Wood AEA 10 years ago as the Accounts Payable Technician. The biggest changes have been in technology; direct deposits, more online applications, a little less paper, etc."

#### **Are there any interesting stories you'd like to share from school districts in which you've worked or within the AEA?**

"So many memories of people then and now. And food days, so many! And Halloween fun, even if I didn't do much. Hunkering down during the Derecho, exchanging any info we could get. My lunch crowd and walking."

#### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"It's the little things. Handling things in a timely manner, as they come up. Keeping up with the work. Staying somewhat organized (lol)."

#### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"The people, of course! The freedom to be sick, take care of family, go to the doctor, etc., without using vacation."

#### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Busy!** There are always bills to pay, payments to file, claims to process, etc."

#### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"This has been the best job I've ever had. I'm proud to have worked here. I feel fortunate to have worked here at Grant Wood AEA for the past 10 years. GWAEA has been very accommodating to its employees and the staff truly care about their work."

#### **SANDRA BUSTA**

"I started working at Grant Wood the fall of 2011. I remember the phone call so vividly from Kathy Resewehr when she called to offer me the position of CART Service Provider! It truly was a dream come true to be working at

Grant Wood AEA! Area Education Agencies have always had such a great reputation--and to be hired by Grant Wood AEA, well, I felt so privileged! I told my supervisor, Jeanie Wade Nagle, many times over, that she was an extraordinary supervisor. And I compared the resources available at the agency to the North Pole! It seemed whatever I needed to get my work with childcare centers accomplished, the resources and tech support were available and allowed me to do that. During my 12 years at GWAEA, I have covered Cedar, Johnson, Jones, Linn and Washington counties. In my role as CART Service Provider, essentially a general ed early childhood behavior consultant, I have met and worked with many, many teachers/childcare providers, families and children.

How have things changed in 12 years? I guess I would have to say that the stress, challenges, and traumatic events that have increased in the world have a direct impact on increasing challenging behaviors in our children. The good news is that more and more research and resources are becoming available that offer a wider range of tools, strategies and information to help us teach self-regulation, problem solving, and social emotional skills in our childcare centers. Some days it feels like an uphill battle, and some days the stars align, and I get to witness a child self-regulate, solve a problem and be a friend--and this gives me hope. I know I am leaving the children in good hands with all of the dedicated, skilled staff at Grant Wood that I am saying goodbye to. And even in retirement, I hope to find a way to continue to be an advocate for children."

#### **Are there any interesting stories you'd like to share from school districts in which you've worked or within the AEA?**

"So many stories! I have taught many breathing techniques to staff and children over the years. One time when I returned the following week to a center after I had taught breathing lessons to the preschool class, a boy came up to me and said, with the biggest smile on his face, 'I made up a new breathing idea!' He put his arms around me and took

three deep breaths and said, 'This is HUG breathing!'"

Sometimes I get to sit down and play a game and visit with children that have had no voice in the classroom setting and the small act of interacting with them on their level, somehow makes a difference. I remember so well one in particular time. I was playing a game with three boys and just visiting with them, and eventually all of the boys spoke and suddenly two of them said of the third boy, with shocked looks on their faces, 'He just talked! He talked!'" I have definitely been so very lucky to have this job."

#### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"The relationships I have made."

#### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"The people! I have met and made best friends at the agency and have worked alongside the most professional, skilled, knowledgeable and dedicated people in early childhood! I have been fortunate to have three of the best supervisors ever! I mentioned Jeanie earlier, and I need to thank Melissa Grennan and Jess Burger, too, as all three were always there to help me through the tough spots and to celebrate the victories! Their support and guidance have been priceless."

#### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Amazed!** I'm amazed by people all the time! Young and old, each with a story and each doing the best they can in the moment."

#### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"I'm just so lucky that I had the opportunity to work at Grant Wood AEA! All I can say is thank you."

#### **KATHY CURPHEY**

"I started in the fall of 1989. I was a speech-language pathologist with the Early Childhood Team. My job was to evaluate

and provide intervention for children 3-5 years old, before entering Kindergarten. I traveled a lot, going to preschools, daycares, and homes to evaluate children and provide speech support services for those that were eligible. I was in this position until the fall of 2001 when I switched to being a SLP in the CRCSD. I was at several schools during this part of my work journey, including Coolidge (now West Willow), Jackson, St. Matthew, and CR Washington HS. In the fall of 2012, I joined the Early Childhood Literacy team. I have worked in several districts, providing support to preschool teachers on emerging literacy instruction. This year, I am continuing my role on the literacy team while returning to direct speech services as one of the SLPs at Buford Garner in the ICCSD."

### **Are there any interesting stories you'd like to share from school districts in which you've worked or within the AEA?**

"At the beginning of my employment at GWAEA, when I would enter daycares or preschools, the children would always ask me whose mom I was. Then one day (about a year ago LOL), that changed. A child asked me whose grandma I was. It stopped me in my tracks! I became old in that moment. Since I actually was a grandma by the time that happened, I was able to see it as a compliment. Interestingly, there always seems to be at least one student in the classroom who has a 'Grandma Kathy'. It makes me quite popular with the students."

### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"Most recently, being a part of the the team created and presented the Intentional Teacher course here at GWAEA. The team included several disciplines with the focus of enhancing learning at the preschool level."

### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"I like that my work made a difference in the lives of the students, families, and teachers that I have encountered throughout the years. Also my coworkers, who have made me a better SLP, Early Childhood literacy consultant, and person."

### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Dynamic:** synonyms include changing, driving, productive, intense, zippy, and strenuous. Why? Over all these years, the constant has been the yearly changes: assignments, co-workers, initiatives, paperwork, GWAEA offices, and of course, cars (I put a lot of miles on my many vehicles)."

### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"A heartfelt thank you to all who shared portions of this journey with me."

## **MYRA HALL**

"Many years ago! Literacy Team"

### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"I leave GWAEA with a strong skill set that I did not have when I started. For this I am thankful."

### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"I have met and had the opportunity to work with some amazing people!"

### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Varied.** The myriad opportunities afforded resulted in sort of a build-my-adventure career!"

## **PATTY HOLZMILLER**

"I spent my career at Grant Wood AEA as an Occupational Therapist in Early Access. It has been so rewarding to work with such talented teams that strive to help our families be successful in helping their children grow and learn. In the beginning, IFSP's were all hand written. Through lots of changes we have evolved into now using the ACHIEVE system. We used MapQuest for directions or phoned families ahead of time to get precise directions ("turn left at the old oak tree"). Thank goodness for GPS apps!! Contact with families was made through phone calls and though that still remains, texting has moved into a preferred mode of contact. We use to take toy bags into homes to use during our visits but now have moved to using the evidence based practice of FGRBI. We have only gotten better over the years!"

### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"I am most proud of the work with families, empowering them to gain the skills they needed to help their children grow and learn."

### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"GWAEA always provided new ways to grow and learn to be the best in your profession."

### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Strive,** I always strived to use best practices in regards to interventions used with families and children."

### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"I had the opportunity to work with amazing teams members, all who worked hard to empower families to achieve great things."

## **JANINE KANE**

"I started working at GWAEA as a School Psychologist in August 2014. Since then, COVID-19 changed us forever and students' needs have gotten more complex."

### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"The relationships I have developed with students, their families, and school staff, as well as my work on the CISM Leadership Team and Equity Advisory Committee."

### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"The caring, talented people with whom I work. They continually amaze me with their intelligence, flexibility, compassion, and creativity and how they keep coming back day after day to what are many times very stressful and uncomfortable circumstances."

Also, the students, so many filled with trauma and short on love, who deserve the best each of us can offer every day and more. They are treasures and will remain in my heart."

### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Student-centered.** I have always tried to help school teams focus on student strengths and needs."

### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"Of all the employers I have had over my 46 years of formal employment, I have never had an employer as supportive and committed to my professional learning as GWAEA. Thank you."

## **PENNY MCLAUGHLIN**

"I started at Grant Wood AEA in August of 1999 as a special education consultant and have remained in that role throughout my tenure with Grant Wood. When I first started at Grant Wood I was responsible for academic evaluations as well as providing support to special education teachers. My role has expanded to include behavioral and early childhood evaluations. As Grant Wood added additional curriculum, behavior and autism consultants our work became more collaborative and time with these teams increased."

The overall knowledge we have regarding how children learn, the research based

strategies and resources available have dramatically increased which has improved the quality of teaching offered to many of our struggling learners. Technology has also changed the way we do business since I started my career. When I started teaching we handwrote IEPs on NCR forms and now we have a web based IEP system. Technology advances have made it easier to communicate, collaborate and meet."

### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"My greatest accomplishment has been being able to spend my entire career striving to make a difference in the lives of children, our greatest resource."

### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"The people I have encountered along the way and the relationships I have developed. I have had the opportunity to work and learn from some of the most talented educators in the state. The professional learning opportunities. The opportunity to work with kids has also been a gift."

### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Kids!!** All the work, the continued learning, and the collaboration have centered around helping students, especially those that struggle, to reach their potential and be the best they can be!"

### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"Thank you to all of the wonderful educators and staff I have worked with through the years. You helped to make me a better educator. Thank you for the fabulous ride!!!"

## **CHRISTOPHER SOLDAT**

"I began working at GWAEA in August 2004. I have served as a Science Curriculum Consultant all these years. Our work at the VAST Center involves supporting schools with their science curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The VAST Center has five core pillars for transforming science education, which include: research-based, inquiry-driven curriculum; professional development; materials support; administrative and community support; and appropriate assessment."

We have seen a change in our field with Iowa's adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards/Iowa CORE in 2013. We have become more involved in advocating for High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM), coupled with high-quality professional learning and three-dimensional assessments."

### **Are there any interesting stories you'd like to share from school districts in which you've worked or within the AEA?**

"I worked with area schools with the Enhancing Education Through Technology (E2T2) grant to plan and implement Problem-Based Learning units of instruction. We integrated GPS and GIS software to develop data surrounding local phenomena to help students construct scientific explanations for their investigations. We built this initial start into a three-year grant entitled Inquiry GIS for Science Teaching (IGISST). IGISST developed teachers with Earth Science content and pedagogy. Our summer field experiences included field experiences in various parts of the state coupled with a week at the Okoboji Regents Lakeside Laboratory and a summer geology field experience in Crested Butte, Colorado."

### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"I am very proud of our Math-Science Partnership grants which provided over 300 hours of professional learning opportunities for participating teachers over a three-year span. We have partnered with the University of Iowa Science Education Center, the Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and our local school districts to provide intensive support of the implementation of reform science instruction."

### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"My greatest joy is working in K-12 science classrooms with students. I enjoy asking what questions are they trying to answer and what is making sense to them. I enjoy asking teachers what parts of their instruction engage their learners, how they find out what students know and how will that affect what they will do in the next lesson."

### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Sensemaking.** Everyone is engaged in making sense of the natural world that we live in. Why is the sky blue? Why are their mountain lions in Iowa? What affects the water we drink? The more experiences students have in scientific sensemaking, the more likely it is that we will develop a population of scientifically literate adults."

### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"GWAEA has a planetarium like all the other AEAs in Iowa. We have been fortunate to have a powerful digital

planetarium that provides vast amounts of data and images which students can experience virtually inside the dome. I cannot properly tell you how mind-expanding that is for our students to experience the cosmos. GWAEA has provided the opportunity to grow exponentially in the Science Education field. I am passionate about my career."

## **LEANN TRANA**

"I started at Grant Wood AEA 14 years ago as a school-based Occupational Therapist. There have been a lot of changes! My role changed four years ago when I shifted to serving Early Access."

### **What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure with the agency?**

"Using coaching models to support and empower teachers and families."

### **What have you liked most about working at GWAEA?**

"Time spent with students, families with young children and supportive colleagues."

### **As you reflect on your career at GWAEA, what one word best describes your work and why?**

"**Rewarding.**"

### **Are there any other reflections you'd like to add?**

"I appreciate the opportunity I had at Grant Wood AEA to work with wonderful coworkers and to do what I love the most - support children and their families."

## **NANCY VELDHIJZEN**

"I started at Grant Wood in the fall of 1991 as a School Social Worker. The role of social workers was quite different when I started. I worked a lot with families, took students and their parents to appointments, did many home visits, and served as a liaison between my buildings and families. Several of my colleagues worked directly with students but I didn't do that too often."

Currently, I collaborate with teams developing interventions for students who are struggling with behavior and then, if needed, work with my AEA colleagues to complete an evaluation. I also work closely with the building PBIS teams."

### **Are there any interesting stories you'd like to share from school districts in which you've worked or within the AEA?**

"I always enjoyed going into the preschool and kindergarten classrooms and eavesdropping on conversations. Once I heard a kindergarten girl explain to a little boy, 'It's okay to kiss your family members, but you can't go around just kissing random