

TEAL Professor Cindy Jones Receives Lifetime Achievement Award Honors in Education Gala from First Lady Abby Cox

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Cindy Jones onstage at the Honors in Education Gala with Burke Olsen, publisher at Deseret News, Abby Cox, first lady of Utah, Kathy Garff, board chair of the Robert H. and Katharine B. Garff Foundation, and Sarah Jane Weaver, editor at Deseret News.

Cindy Jones, professor and director of the Literacy Clinic in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership (TEAL) in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services was recently recognized for her outstanding lifetime achievements at the Honors in Education Gala, a celebratory event in conjunction with the Stand Up for Teachers Conference, an initiative of Utah First Lady Abby Cox.

The Honors in Education Gala recognizes the service of remarkable teachers who make a positive impact on their students and communities. Jones was one of two individuals in the state who received a Lifetime Achievement Award and the only awardee who comes from higher education.

"Cindy is very deserving of the lifetime achievement award for her many years of service to education as a teacher and as a scholar," says Marla Robertson, associate professor in TEAL at USU. "Cindy has always been a role model of what an exceptional faculty member should be like. Since I came to USU in 2016, she has supported me in my classes, in my tenure journey, and in my development as a scholar."

Over her 41-year career, Jones has taught learners and future educators from preschool age to the university level. Even as a high school student, Jones sought opportunities to work in teaching. She enrolled in a high school class that allowed her to assist teachers in a local elementary school in Cedar City. "Since I was only 15 and didn't yet have a driver's license, I would walk to the local elementary school, work for an hour, and then walk back to the high school," she recalls. "It was basically a practicum course for high school students."

After high school, Jones attended Southern Utah University and received a bachelor's degree in elementary and middle school education, receiving the Pestalozzi Award for outstanding students of education at SUU, in 1984. Later, she earned a Master's in Education, with professional specializations in Gifted and Talented Education and Social Studies from Utah State University. In 2008, Jones earned her doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction from USU and was hired as a faculty member in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at USU. She has spent the past 16 years as a university professor at Utah State.

Jones's career has provided many opportunities to influence the people around her. In addition to her role as a professor teaching undergraduate and graduate classes each semester, she mentors graduate students and continues to publish her research. From 2020 to 2022, she served as interim department head of TEAL, starting in this position at the beginning of the COVID pandemic. But perhaps her most notable work at Utah State has been her development of the Literacy Clinic, a community outreach program that assists parents and children in accelerating reading and writing development, trains future teachers to effectively use evidence-based instruction, and supports reading specialists through continuing education and professional development. Jones founded the Clinic and has been the director since it began



in 2013.

Part of the reason the Literacy Clinic was created was to address the needs of university students majoring in elementary education. "I believe it is essential that elementary teachers are well prepared to teach children

how to read. When students graduate and teach in their own classrooms, they're going to have a wide range of learners," explains Jones. "For instance, if you're a fourth-grade teacher, you might have readers with skills that range from a kindergarten reading level to an eighth grade reading level. I wanted to help prepare university students to meet the needs of these diverse learners and provide extra training for them."

As such, the Literacy Clinic serves a dual purpose. In addition to providing targeted intervention to help K-6 children receive accelerated growth in reading, it is also a hands-on, in-depth teaching space for preservice teachers. "We prepare future teachers to implement instruction based on the science of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension," says Jones.

"We take the USU students through the whole process just as if they were teachers in their own classrooms," explains Jones. "The preservice teachers learn classroom management and how to motivate children about reading. They teach a half-hour lesson with a student, one-on-one, and then they observe a peer teaching a different lesson. They do this twice each week for the entire semester. The undergraduate students receive guidance and feedback on every lesson plan and every lesson they teach about how to refine instruction to meet the needs of the elementary learners. The undergraduate students also attend a professional learning community for a half-hour where they meet with a small group of peers, similar to what they will do in a school."

Jones continues, "The consistency of learning, then applying, then receiving and implementing feedback makes our preservice students much stronger and more adept at teaching children."

Since the Literacy Clinic opened, the program has continued to evolve and expand. "In 11 years, we've scaled from five volunteer tutors per semester up to 72," says Jones. "We run sixteen sessions of tutoring Monday through Thursday. We have 10,000 books in the library now. When we started, we didn't have a dedicated library, clocks in the rooms or bulletin boards. Now, we really are a mini school focused on literacy and reading."

In addition, since Fall semester 2018, every student who earns an elementary education degree at USU's Logan campus is required to spend a semester working in the Literacy Clinic.

For the children being tutored, the results are often remarkable, but, Jones says, "we are really just focused

on seeing accelerated growth and enjoyment in reading for the children. We're here to support the schools and the parents, providing targeted intervention to help children have accelerated growth in reading."

Though the numbers aren't exact because some children are tutored over multiple semesters and even multiple years, the Literacy Clinic serves approximately 65 children each semester, which amounts to more than 1,300 children served over the 11 years since it opened. The Literacy Clinic now operates with a waitlist and priority is assigned by application date.

Jones views her recent lifetime achievement award as a great honor, but she also recognizes that her work at Utah State will continue its upward trajectory regardless of the recognition she receives. "Reading clinics are becoming the new push in universities, but we have been at the forefront for more than a decade now. I want to continue to influence teacher education and the lives of children and parents for the better by promoting effective literacy skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. So, this is a wonderful place to be."

To learn more about the USU Literacy Clinic and to place your child on the waitlist, visit the [Literacy Clinic website](#).