

# Macomb County teacher who survived cancer recognized for excellence



*Nikki Simons is interviewed after being presented with an Excellence in Education award from the Michigan Lottery. PHOTO COURTESY MICHIGAN LOTTERY*  
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A Macomb County educator known for her dedication to help students succeed -- and who refused to let cancer interrupt her relationship with her students -- has been honored with the Excellence in Education award from the Michigan Lottery.

Nikki Simons, who teaches second grade at Cheyenne Elementary School in Macomb Township, said her favorite parts of being an educator are “seeing the children smile and enjoying learning something new every day and also seeing former students and hearing that I’ve encouraged them to keep trying and never give up!”

She said she chose education as a profession because “my mom was a teacher’s assistant in schools when I was a child and I wanted to be just like her. I’m proud to say I’m a Chippewa Valley High School graduate and now am a teacher for the Chippewa Valley Schools!”

Simon said her students motivate her to give her best every day.

“It’s knowing that I can inspire them to also make a difference each day and to always try their best. I was faced with cancer in December and had to adhere to my own advice and not give up, to face the challenge, and to try my best to overcome cancer. Being a cancer survivor for only a few months, it’s a joy to be back in the classroom with my children and see each and every day that I make a difference and I can do anything!”

The Michigan Lottery established the Excellence in Education awards in 2014 to recognize outstanding public school educators across the state during the school year. Winners of the weekly award receive a plaque, a \$1,500 cash prize, and a \$500 grant to their classroom, school or school district.

One of the weekly winners will be selected as the Educator of the Year and will receive a \$10,000 cash prize.

The Excellence in Education award nomination for Simons described her as a dedicated teacher who provides individualized attention to each of her students. To foster a love of reading in them, Simons created a “book in a bag” program so students may take home a fiction or non-fiction book, read it with their families, and then share their thoughts on the book with the class, the nomination said.

“She also has teddy bears for the children to take home or on a vacation. The students track the places where the bears go by keeping a diary for the bears and taking photos of them on their travels. Students love learning about America and other places through these bears and their travels,” according to the nomination.

It also noted Simons’ dedication to her students didn’t stop when she was diagnosed with cancer and “she was devastated to have to leave her class and her kids. Even as she was going through this terrible time in her life and having tiring treatments, she still wrote letters to her students to encourage them to read and write. Sometimes, she came in to her classroom after hours to leave notes and treats on their desks.”

Simons also made a holiday visit to her classroom to see her students, even though her treatments had weakened her and the visit put her at risk of becoming ill, the nomination said. At the end of the year, she provided a teddy bear to each student to take on their summer travels and write in a diary.

Simons earned a bachelor’s degree in education from Oakland University, a master’s degree in early childhood specialist degree from Saginaw Valley State University, and a master’s degree in reading and language arts from Oakland University and Walden University. She has been an educator for 23 years, including the past 20 with the Chippewa Valley Schools.

Outstanding public school educators may be nominated for an Excellence in Education award at [bit.ly/ExcellenceInEducation](http://bit.ly/ExcellenceInEducation) or through the websites of the Lottery’s television media partner stations.

Excellence in Education nominees are evaluated on the following criteria: Excellence, dedication, inspiration, leadership and effectiveness.