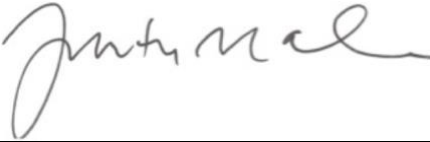


NOMINATION SIGNATURE PAGE

2024 Virginia Outstanding Faculty Awards

Nominations must include this as the cover page of the nomination package PDF submission

Name of Applicant:	Dr. Melissa Wells
Institution:	University of Mary Washington
Category (choose only one): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baccalaureate Institution• Masters/Comprehensive Institution• Research/Doctoral Institution• Two-Year Institution• Rising Star	Baccalaureate Institution
Signature of President or Chief Academic Officer:	
Printed Name of President or Chief Academic Officer:	Dr. Timothy O'Donnell
E-mail address of President or Chief Academic Officer:	todonnel@umw.edu
Telephone number of President or Chief Academic Officer:	540-654-1252

Excerpts from the University of Mary Washington Mission Statement

The University is a place where faculty, students, and staff share in the creation and exploration of knowledge through freedom of inquiry, personal responsibility, and service. The University offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs focusing on both disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies. These academic programs afford students opportunities to integrate and apply their knowledge within broad educational experiences, to develop their professional interests, and to practice the habits of mind necessary for life-long learning. Through professionally engaged faculty, the University supports ongoing research appropriate to the development of student abilities and faculty interests. It especially encourages the participation of undergraduates in research.

UMW's size, dedicated faculty, and historical commitment to fine teaching create an institutional culture where both undergraduate and graduate students benefit from strong connections with their faculty and multiple opportunities for active learning.

We fulfill our mission by immersing students, faculty, and staff in local, regional, national, and international communities, and by inculcating the values of honor and integrity. UMW graduates are models of adaptive learning, personal achievement, responsible leadership, service to others, and engaged citizenship in a global and diverse society.

Summary of Accomplishments

Since joining the faculty of the University of Mary Washington in 2017, Dr. Melissa Wells has infused her passions for equity, accessibility, and inclusion into her teaching, scholarship, and service within and beyond the College of Education. She continually strives to provide pre- and in-service teachers with opportunities to inspire them to make positive changes in the world.

Teaching

Wells has gained recognition for her instruction in undergraduate, graduate, and professional development courses. She prioritizes accessible, personalized learning. Her students acknowledge that she teaches with “enthusiasm and joy” and “is passionate about what she teaches, cares for her students and their progress, and always is there to answer questions or clarify misunderstandings.”

- Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Wells anticipates barriers to students’ success and proactively addresses them.
 - She co-creates syllabus policies with students; crafts dynamic Canvas courses that students recognize as “extremely well-organized... which makes assignments and activities easy to follow” and that they “wish other professors could model after”; and designs learning opportunities that students praise for their “interactive... first-hand experience,” frequently embedding learner choice and relevance to the realities of teachers.
 - Students also appreciate the personalized feedback Wells provides on every assignment, noting “thoughtful feedback... showed us ways in which we can improve in the future.”
 - Wells constantly reflects on her teaching and makes revisions to her courses, modeling the data-driven instruction her students will implement in their future classrooms. For example, when concerns about students’ mental health during the pandemic escalated, she revised her course “Children’s Literature and the Arts in Elementary Classrooms” to include arts for self-care assignments.
- Additionally, Wells models instructional approaches her students will implement in their own future classrooms.
 - In “Children’s Literature and the Arts in Elementary Classrooms,” she plans arts integration demonstration lessons with experts across campus. In Spring 2022, she co-taught a lesson with a UMW art historian utilizing the work of African American artists featured in an exhibit in the UMW Galleries.
 - In this course, students have also written and illustrated almost 25 personalized children’s books to donate to local classrooms. Three additional children’s books students wrote have been displayed on the public StoryWalk trail downtown in collaboration with the Fredericksburg Parks, Recreation, and Events Department. The StoryWalk encourages community members to read as they walk the River Heritage Trail. This project has been featured on the UMW website, the *Freelance Star*, and in presentations for UMW’s Research and Creativity Day.
- Beyond formal coursework, Wells seeks opportunities to mentor students toward lifelong learning and professional excellence.
 - In 2019, she mentored a group of former students to present the results of their research related to equity, accessibility, and inclusion in children’s literature as roundtables at the NCTE conference in Baltimore, MD. This was the first professional conference most of the students attended.
 - Wells has also co-mentored student research projects as independent studies for programs outside the COE, including the Women and Gender Studies and Honors programs.

Wells's dedication to high-quality instruction has resulted in repeated recognitions. In her second year at UMW, College of Education students selected her to receive the UMW KDP chapter's "Honor an Educator" award. In her third year at UMW, Wells became the first-ever faculty member from the College of Education—the smallest college with the smallest student population—to receive the university-wide Mary W. Pinschmidt Award since its establishment in 1999. The entire senior class votes to name the professor that has had the greatest impact on their lives. Wells was nominated again for this award two years later. Unsolicited letters of appreciation from students praise her "safe, fun, and easily-accessible learning environment," willingness to "push me out of my comfort zone," and dedication to "make sure her students feel included and loved every day." Another student commented, "Dr. Wells is everything that I could want in a professor; she inspires me to keep learning and branching out, and I hope that I will be able to have a similar relationship with my future students."

Discovery

Wells's scholarship focuses on equity in the context of literacy education, family engagement, teacher preparation, and arts. In six years, Wells has disseminated her scholarship in over 15 peer-reviewed publications and over 55 peer-reviewed or invited presentations at state, national and international conferences, while maintaining a full-time teaching load of four courses each semester. Wells carefully considers the accessibility of her scholarship to other educators, choosing to publish in open venues whenever possible.

- Wells has an openly-accessible article in *The Reading Teacher* (Wells, Morrison, & López-Robertson, 2022) about shared classroom strategies for enacting critical reading and critical literacy skills through picture books. *The Reading Teacher* is a flagship publication from the International Literacy Association (ILA) for K-8 teachers with a CiteScore of 1.9 and a five-year impact factor of 1.993. Since January 2022, this article has had 3,700 views.
- Wells was the lead author *Foundations of American Education: A Critical Lens* (Wells & Clayton, 2021) as a result of a \$10,000 competitive research grant through the Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA). This book is an open educational resource (OER), allowing students at UMW and beyond to access it at no cost. Since its publication in August 2021, the book has had almost 82,000 visitors with 186,000 total page views. Wells has received unsolicited correspondence from instructors across the country using this text, including comments praising "the way it provides a thoughtful critique of our education system."
- A book published with Routledge, *Re-envisioning Family Engagement and Literacy in Early Childhood Classrooms: "Porque haci ya conocemos"* (López-Robertson & Wells, 2023) applies the theory of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to engaging families in early childhood settings. The book utilizes field-based research to create strategies for building upon students' and families' diverse assets within and beyond the classroom. It also provides suggestions for using award-winning children's literature and digital tools to celebrate the gifts and talents all families bring to early childhood spaces.
- Additionally, Wells pursues scholarly projects related to current challenges and innovation in educational spaces. She is part of a team of researchers in the UMW COE investigating the impact of virtual internships during the pandemic on relationships between interns and their mentor teachers. This multiple-year project began by focusing on interns' experiences during their year-long internship, resulting in numerous peer-reviewed publications and presentations at state and local conferences. The project is ongoing, studying continuing impacts of the pandemic on early career teachers.

Knowledge Integration

In addition, Wells has engaged in research that connects discovery and teaching through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), a methodology involving inquiry into student learning.

- During the pandemic, Wells researched the impact of replacing a traditional field-based practicum experience with a virtual tutoring experience she designed for preservice teachers in her intermediate literacy course. Based on this research, Wells made adjustments to her instruction by explicitly teaching students how to access digital literacy resources and effectively engage elementary students in virtual spaces, which are skills future teachers will need even post-pandemic.
- During the 2022-2023 academic year, Wells received a competitive UMW Jepson research grant to study how early career teachers implement arts integration strategies in their own classrooms. Based on these findings, she is adjusting her undergraduate coursework to include renewed focus on assessment, resource identification, and networking students and early-career teachers with targeted professional development opportunities.
- From 2020 through 2022, Wells worked with the SoTL Collaboratory, comprised of representatives from Centers for Teaching from six public higher education institutions in Virginia. The group recognized a lack of networked support for scaling SoTL at individual institutions. The SoTL Collaboratory produced tools to support SoTL work, resulting in numerous publications, presentations, and workshops at state, national, and international levels.
- Wells also integrates discovery into her work in K-12 settings. She has worked with local school districts to offer professional development opportunities related to her expertise in arts integration, culturally relevant pedagogy, and literacy. Based on her work with in-service teachers, Wells prioritizes constant innovations to her own university teaching to equip future teachers for the realities of current educational trends and needs.

Service

Wells is recognized across campus for her care-centered, courageous approach to service at and beyond UMW. She serves on approximately four committees each year, often filling leadership roles on multiple committees simultaneously. She has chaired two university committees and one college committee. In addition, Wells fulfills special service roles at the university and remains active in community and professional service.

- As co-chair of the University Faculty Organization Committee (UFOC), Wells organized and compiled a report detailing recommendations for streamlining university service.
- In the College of Education, Wells led the creation of a common lesson plan template used by all faculty in the College of Education and helped design a new master's program.
- Wells is currently leading efforts across all three colleges at UMW to create a unified digital process for tenure and promotion.
- She served as a Faculty Fellow in the reorganized Center for Teaching (2019-2022).
 - Wells supported colleagues to pivot to online instruction during the pandemic through individual consults and professional development sessions. Colleagues commented that they still use techniques and structures learned from these engagements in their current classes.
 - Wells led communities of practice including a three-semester "Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Scholars" group which supported UMW faculty to design, implement, and disseminate their own SoTL projects. Eleven faculty from all three colleges participated.
- Wells co-created and piloted a Search Advocates program at UMW.

- The mission of Search Advocates (founded at Oregon State University in 2009) is to make the faculty hiring process more equitable and inclusive.
 - Since 2021, Wells has completed over 18 hours of training, served as a Search Advocate on multiple searches, and led numerous training opportunities for colleagues at UMW.
- Additionally, Wells prioritizes service opportunities that strengthen K-12 education in local communities.
 - She has supported campus visits from “Teachers for Tomorrow” (TFT) high school students by welcoming prospective teachers into classes and sharing instructional resources with local TFT instructors.
 - Wells helped lead the pilot of Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships with local K-12 schools. She serves as a university facilitator at an elementary school, spending roughly 60 hours each semester offering in-person, site-based support for pre-service and in-service teachers. To support the school’s goal of boosting science scores, Wells offers professional development, lesson planning support, and in-classroom modeling, co-teaching, and observation with arts integration.
- Finally, Wells has demonstrated a commitment to service in professional organizations.
 - In 2016, she was named to ILA’s “30 Under 30” list and also identified as an ASCD Emerging Leader.
 - In 2023, she was named to a three-year term on NCTE’s Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children, which involves reading up to 500 pieces of nonfiction children’s literature published each year and determining a winner of the award.
 - She has supported educational organizations by reviewing over 60 article, book, presentation, and grant proposals for national organizations like NCTE, ASCD, and the *Transformative Dialogues* journal; for regional organizations such as the *Southeastern Regional Association of Teacher Educators*; and for state organizations like the Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA) and the Virginia State Reading Association.

Summary

Through her teaching, discovery, knowledge integration, and service, Wells demonstrates a clear and consistent commitment to enacting UMW’s mission. As an award-winning educator, actively-published scholar, and constant service leader, Wells demonstrates how fostering connections among teaching, discovery, knowledge integration, and service can lead to outcomes where students can make positive changes in the world.

Personal Statement

We are who we are because of the people we meet along the way.

Abbie taught me to see possibilities. When I was in 5th grade, I helped Abbie's kindergarten class at lunch. Abbie had Down Syndrome. She was the only kindergartener who could tell me apart from my twin sister. She taught me to focus on what people *can* do. Abbie taught me that I wanted to be a teacher one day.

Rodney taught me to rewrite stories. When I was in my first year teaching, Rodney's name on my third grade roster was the one my coworkers saw and whispered, "Oh! He's trouble." When I called his mother one day to celebrate a conversation he had with me about our classroom's reading area, she told me, "You're the first teacher to ever call and tell me something *good* Rodney did." He taught me that sometimes the stories we hear about others are not their whole stories. Rodney taught me that before we learn, we must relate.

Ariya taught me to question educational equity. When I was in my third year teaching, Ariya was a kindergartener who seemed to always be getting in arguments. During a parent-teacher conference, Ariya's mom stated that I was unable to see her child's full potential because I was racist. Ariya was Black; I am White. That was the most painful day of my teaching career, but also the most transformative. Ariya and her mother taught me that schools often operate on invisible norms—about curriculum, stories, and behavior—that welcome some students and not others. Ariya and her mother taught me that I have a responsibility to learn more about my students' and families' cultures to craft educational spaces honoring the knowledge and experiences of all.

Omar taught me to use books as a symbol of belonging. When I was in my first year as a literacy coach, Omar was in a group of fifth graders who received supplemental reading support. As we passed books around the group one day, he grabbed *The Librarian of Basura*. He excitedly pointed to a picture with a symbol on a flag and announced, "Do you know what that says? That says Allah! That means *my* God!" He taught me the power of connecting students with books that reflect their lives, worlds, and experiences. Omar taught me that books can help us unlock knowledge as well as belonging.

Lynn taught me to center empathy in my teaching. When I was in my first year in higher education in Virginia, Lynn's contributions in class were insightful and thoughtful, but she started to miss a lot of class. Lynn taught me that non-attendance does not always coincide with a lack of commitment. She taught me to ask, "Is everything OK?" instead of making assumptions about why a student might not be present, physically or mentally. Lynn taught me that mental health can have very tangible impacts on academic achievement, social connections, and life.

At every stage of my career, students like these have changed my identity as an educator. Because of them, I prioritize teaching with empathy, innovation, accessibility, and authenticity. I thrive when students bring their own stories, gifts, and talents into spaces they share with me. In my teaching, I intentionally craft learning experiences that provide learners with choice, relevance, and responsiveness. I recognize that every student in my classroom has different strengths and needs, and these elements allow them to control their own learning experiences—while also teaching *me*. As I recently listened to my Foundations of Education students present "Wanted" posters, invented bobbleheads, and commercials they created to teach the class about an educational theorist, I found myself repeatedly impressed by my students' products—work that I could not have created myself. From my perspective, this is the future of higher education: communities centered on mutual knowledge exchange, allowing all members to construct deeper understandings collaboratively.

Relevance and responsiveness drive the selection and implementation of my scholarly pursuits as I constantly question, *How can I learn more about making education inclusive, accessible, and empowering for all educators and students?* I especially prioritize research that reflects the needs and realities of the students and educational communities with which I work. Some of the challenges relevant to my local communities have led me to research projects

focused on supporting teachers with selecting culturally relevant reading materials and planning arts-integrated lessons; studying preservice teachers' growth in their understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy; comparing preservice teachers' experiences in in-person versus virtual practicum placements to explore how to harness the unique benefits of both; and navigating the ongoing evolution of mentor/intern relationships during and after the pandemic to see how to best support interns and mentors. Additionally, I seek out opportunities to share findings in ways that provide access to a range of stakeholders, including practicing teachers who often do not have access to resources behind paywalls. Sometimes, needed resources simply do not exist, and I have had opportunities to help fill these voids. For example, when we could not locate a high-quality, no-cost Foundations of Education textbook that integrated inquiry and culturally relevant pedagogy, I collaborated with others to create one. While I was taken aback by the popularity of this text beyond UMW, I believe this response highlights a need for a resource such as this one.

Centering empathy also frames my service contributions at the university, community, and professional levels as I learn with and from a variety of colleagues and professionals. But more significantly, I see service as a way to collaboratively seek possibilities for change that can lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes for all. My dedication to supporting causes that offer unique possibilities for change has guided me to assume leadership roles from very early stages of my academic career. Before earning tenure, I was one of two faculty developers of UMW's Search Advocates program. I was drawn to this opportunity to serve because it aligned closely with my passion for inclusivity and equity. I completed 18 hours of training, co-designed and co-lead two years of training programming, and served on two searches as a Search Advocate—all before being tenured. For me, the opportunity to collaboratively build a program that reframed how to run faculty searches with greater inclusivity and equity outweighed the protection of waiting to do this work until I was tenured. It takes courage to challenge the status quo, but it also takes hope, empathy, and humility.

In closing, one common refrain from my time as a Girl Scout often guides me: "Leave a place better than you found it." As a Girl Scout, this phrase invited us to straighten up our meeting places to show respect for others. I think what left the greatest impact on me, though, is that we have power and agency to *choose* to make our world a more welcoming and inclusive place for others every day. Abbie, Rodney, Ariya, Omar, and Lynn, each through their own gifts, left my world better than they found it. On a daily basis I take their lessons to help make the educational communities I co-inhabit—with students and colleagues in higher education, K-12 education, the local community, and my professional community—better places too. We are who we are because of the people we meet along the way, and I look forward to a lifetime of learning with and from the students and colleagues who will help grow a better world than any of us found it.

Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

University of Mary Washington, College of Education: Associate Professor (tenured; 2023-present), Assistant Professor (2017-2023)

Ph.D., Language and Literacy, University of South Carolina (2017)

M.A., Early Childhood Education, Furman University (2010)

B.A., Elementary Education, Music, Furman University (2009)

SELECTED AWARDS, HONORS, & FELLOWSHIPS

UMW Jepson Fellow (2022-2023)

UMW Mary W. Pinschmidt Award (2020; nominated 2022)

ASCD Emerging Leader (2016)

International Literacy Association (ILA) 30 Under 30 (2016)

SELECTED GRANTS

Wells, M. S., & Clayton, C. (2020). *Foundations of Education, Foundations of OER*. Course re-design, Virtual Library of Virginia [VIVA] (\$10,000).

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Books:

López-Robertson, J., & Wells, M. S. (2023). *Re-envisioning family engagement and literacy in early childhood classrooms: "Porque haci ya conocemos."* Routledge.

Wells, M. S., & Clayton, C. (2021). *Foundations of American education: A critical lens*. VIVA. <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/foundationsofamericaneducation/>

Refereed Journal Articles/Book Chapters (15+ refereed articles/book chapters):

Lukes, L.A., Abbot, S., Henry, D., **Wells, M.**, Baum, L., Case, K., Brantmeier, E.J., & Wheeler, L. (2023). Impact of a regional community of practice for academic developers engaged in institution-level support for SoTL. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2022.2135005>

Wells, M.S. (2022). "I used to think, but now I know": Interrupting preservice teachers' beliefs about equity. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal*, 15(2), 94-135. <https://doi.org/10.26209/td2022vol15iss21745>

Wells, M. S., Morrison, J. D., & López-Robertson, J. (2022). Building critical reading and critical literacy with picture book analysis. *The Reading Teacher*, 76(2), 191-200. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2130>

Wells, M.S., Irish, C.K., Peck, K.A., Davis, J.S., & Clayton, C. (2022). Innovations in intern/mentor relationships and conceptions of the technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) framework. *The Teacher Educators' Journal*, 15(2), 1-26.

Wells, M.S. (2022). Rewriting field-based literacy practicum experiences: Lessons learned from a virtual literacy practicum. In J. Araujo & D. Araujo (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Reconceptualizing Preservice Teacher Preparation in Literacy Education* (pp. 179-201). IGI Global.

Wells, M. S. (2018). Critical coaching: Approaching literacy coaching through a critical lens. *Perspectives and Provocations*, 7(4), 1-36.

Professional Presentations (55+ conference presentations and invited talks):

Wells, M. (2023, July 31). *Advocating for arts: Arts integration, early-career teachers, and implications for teacher education* [Paper]. Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) Summer Conference, Washington, DC.

- Wells, M.**, López-Robertson, J., & Haney, M.J. (2022, November 19). *Sharing our sueños: The intersection of community cultural wealth and family engagement in early childhood settings* [Conference presentation]. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference, Anaheim, CA.
- Wells, M.**, Clayton, C., Hoffman, A., & Spence, C. (2022, July 31). *Open educational resources (OERs): A model of equity in education* [Paper]. Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) summer conference, Nashville, TN.
- Wells, M.** (2021, November 11). *Shifting landscapes in field-based practicum experiences: Lessons learned from virtual literacy practicum* [Conference presentation]. Virginia Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators (VACTE) conference, virtual.
- Wells, M.**, Brewer, C., Campos-Dintrans, G., Dunn, A., Good, K., Jenkins, M., Mathur, M., & Wells, R. (2021, October 27). *Sustainable small networks: Creating a SoTL Scholars program at a teaching-focused university* [Conference presentation]. International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference, Perth, Australia/virtual.
- Wells, M. S. (2021, March 10). *A world of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors: Honoring diverse voices in school library collections* [Conference presentation]. South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL) conference, virtual.
- Wells, M. (2020, November 20). *The intersection of restorative justice and literacy instruction in the English language arts context* [Conference presentation]. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference, virtual.
- Wells, M. (2019, November 24). *Equity & access in children's literature: Pre-service teachers' inquiry projects* [Roundtable presentation]. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference, Baltimore, MD.

SELECTED UNIVERSITY AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

University:

UMW Search Advocates Program: Developer/Trainer and Search Advocate (2021-present)
 University Faculty Council (UFC): Member (2021-present), Co-Secretary (2022-2023)
 University Faculty Organizing Committee (UFOC): Secretary (2020-2021), Chair (2021-2023)
 Center for Teaching: Faculty Fellow (2019-2022)
 Open Educational Resources (OER) Working Group (2019-2021)
 James Farmer Multicultural Committee: Member (2018-2021), Chair (2020-2021)

College of Education:

Professional Development School University Liaison (2022-present)
 COE Faculty Affairs Committee: Member (2021-present), Chair (2022-present)
 COE Faculty Council: Secretary (2020-present)
 COE Curriculum & Assessment Committee: Member (2018-2022), Secretary (2018-2021)

Professional:

NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children: Committee Member (2023-present)
 NCTE Position Statement, "Read Together: Parents and Educators Working Together for Literacy": Revision Team Member (2018)
 Reviewer: *Transformative Dialogues* Journal (2021-present); VIVA OER Grant Proposals (2021-present); ASCD Book Reviews (2021-present); *Southeastern Regional Association of Teacher Educators* Journal (2018-present); NCTE National Conference (2023); VSRA State Conference (2020); ASCD Empower Conference (2019)
 Professional Development Provider for K-12 Schools (2019-present)

Letters of Support (Excerpts)

Dr. Melissa Wells' nomination for the Outstanding Faculty Award is richly deserved. Dr. Wells joined the University of Mary Washington as Assistant Professor of Education in 2017 and was promoted to Associate Professor of Education in 2023. I have gotten to know her well during this time and have been thoroughly impressed by the great care she takes with all that she does in the classroom, with her research, and in service to our university and the larger community. Preparing future teachers is so critical in the Fredericksburg region and around the Commonwealth and Dr. Wells does this as well as anyone I've ever met. As her colleagues would say, she prioritizes the humanity of teaching helping aspiring teachers focus on who they are becoming teachers for. She has exceptionally high standards and the precision and acuity she brings to all that she does is incomparable. Demanding of herself and others, she is a model of what it takes to do educator preparation well. Dr. Wells has my highest recommendation and among the many talented and outstanding faculty at UMW, she has truly distinguished herself. **Dr. Timothy O'Donnell, Provost, University of Mary Washington**

Dr. Wells has leveraged her research expertise and professional development practice to simultaneously improve teaching and learning in schools, and to enhance the authenticity of her teacher preparation with students in the College of Education. In my experience, it is rare to find a teacher educator who combines top-notch scholarly expertise with the "wisdom of practice" of the K-12 Master Teacher. In reflecting on the impact of her work on her students, her K-12 partners, and the University of Mary Washington, the adage that springs to mind is "a rising tide lifts all boats". The courage, kindness, and excellence she brings to all aspects of her work, and her commitment to her students' success makes all of us better at the University of Mary Washington, and in our K-12 partner schools. **Dr. Peter Kelly, Dean-College of Education, University of Mary Washington**

I first met Dr. Wells through her work with the Search Advocates program. The conversations Search Advocates have are always constructive, but they can be difficult at times. It takes an individual with strong character, conviction, and gumption to serve in such a role. I would also like to note that it was even more impressive that she assumed this responsibility as an untenured faculty member. Some would shy away from taking on a role like this at that point in their career out of concern for their future, but not her. Her commitment to doing what is right loomed larger than what would lie ahead on her professional path. I have found her to be an outstanding problem solver who is thoughtful and creative in the solutions that she puts forth. She knows exactly how and when to use the right kind of communication style that is needed for any situation. **Dr. Shavonne Shorter, Associate Provost for Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer, University of Mary Washington**

Dr. Wells blends a wonderful tolerance for the messiness of teaching (and committee work) with a passion for setting things in order, and all to the betterment of the larger community. She recognizes the value of letting things get a little out of control (worthwhile digressions in class discussions, faculty venting in committee meetings) in the interest of honest, genuine, *human* experience. For her, it is not simply about get the job done, but doing the job in such a way that makes a better place, that puts those who follow her in a better starting position than she had. Dr. Wells accepts her students just as they are; better still, she accepts her faculty colleagues the same way; but for both colleagues and students, she pushes us to learn and grow. Her confidence that we can do that is inspiring. **Dr. James Brooks Kuykendall, Professor & Chair-Department of Music, University of Mary Washington**

Dr. Wells' passion for technology, particularly in creating digital spaces for families from marginalized communities, is sought by national organizations. She brought her zeal for this to our book, making it a unique contribution to the scholarship on Family Engagement and early childhood literacy. Dr. Wells has established a clearly focused research agenda in effective instructional literacy practices, digital literacies, and technologies for minoritized families, and in improving teacher preparation through culturally responsive pedagogy. Dr. Wells' scholarship clearly demonstrates her desire to disseminate knowledge at all levels and for all audiences.

Dr. Julia López-Robertson, Professor of Instruction and Teacher Education, University of South Carolina College of Education

Dr. Wells is known throughout the College of Education student body for her dedication to high quality education opportunities-both for her higher education students and the students we work with in our classrooms. Dr. Wells prioritizes building relationships with her students. She possesses an enthusiastic attitude that encapsulates all students who work with her. Dr. Wells' coursework emphasizes the necessity for research-based teaching strategies and encourages students to delve deeper in their own research on topics that interest them. **Amira Akim, Former Student and UMW Alumna, Second Grade Teacher at Lois Harrison-Jones Elementary School, Richmond, VA**

I believe that the very first time a teacher steps into a classroom, they set an example of the expectations they have of themselves and of their students without having to say a single word. Dr. Wells can step into any room on campus, and students feel safe and open with her almost immediately. Dr. Wells ensures that each student knows they are welcome in her classroom—free to ask questions, explore ideas, make mistakes, and take chances. I believe that Dr. Wells leads future teachers by example, by holding herself to the same standards. **Shaun McBride, Former Student and UMW Alumnus, Theatre Teacher at Drew Middle School, Fredericksburg, VA**

For three years now, Dr. Wells has guided her students through the creation of unique stories, specific to the Fredericksburg area, to include in our StoryWalk for the entire community to enjoy. The creativity of each class has blown me away with each iteration and has greatly enhanced the quality of the FXBG StoryWalk the past three summers. I have seen first-hand the impact she has on her students, who in turn are leaving their impact on our whole community. Through this StoryWalk project, university students (and future teachers) are learning the effect that books have on children and their families as well as finding ways to give back to their community in unique ways. **Callie Brown, Superintendent of Recreation, Fredericksburg Parks, Rec, and Events**

One of our school goals was to increase science scores in all grade levels due to previous data. Dr. Wells supported us with hands-on instruction through arts integration. She instructed our teachers on assisting students to make connections in an art form to the area of science. When working with our third-grade team during Professional Learning Communities Dr Wells learned the art interests of each team member. She then assisted the team in developing science plans that incorporated these art forms. Students were able to learn and maintain information through the use of tableaus, songs and music. An increase in science test scores was evident across the grade level...She provided arts integration support as well as lesson ideas, co-teaching, and classroom management. Her time at Spotswood was invaluable to many. **Susan M. Pearson, Mentor Coach and Liaison, Spotsylvania Elementary School**