UCSN TEACHER FINALIST FOR ILLINOIS TEACHER OF THE YEAR
First charter school teacher to be named a finalist for the prestigious award

(Chicago) – The UNO Charter School Network (UCSN) announced that Anthony Zarate has been named as a finalist for the Illinois State Board of Education’s annual Teacher of the Year Award. Zarate, who has been with UCSN for three years, teaches English Language Arts to 7th and 8th graders at UCSN Brighton Park Elementary School in Chicago.

The Illinois Teacher of the Year is selected from the Award of Excellence winners in the Classroom Teacher category. Program organizers said that Zarate is the first charter school teacher to become a finalist for the award. The winner will be announced in October.

“Anthony embodies what we look for in a teacher and we are so proud that he is part of the UCSN family. We believe our students deserve the opportunity to reach their highest potential and Anthony has the ability to inspire and engage students so that they want to want to learn and achieve,” said Matt Moeller, Chief of Schools for UCSN.

Zarate earned a bachelor's degree in Urban Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and a master’s degree in Elementary Education at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. He joined the Chicago branch of Teach for America in 2013 and was hired at UCSN Brighton Park by School Director Laura Castle.

“The best way to describe Anthony is transformative,” said Castle. “Whether he is working with students, parents or colleagues, he inspires everyone to be engaged and successful. Every team he is on becomes a high performing team because his passion and abilities lift up everyone around him.”

Zarate said he is motivated by the transformative power of education. “My parents came to this country as immigrants from the Philippines and it was stressed how important education was for us to thrive here. I think about this every day and I raise the bar for my students. Knowing how important education was for the trajectory of my life and how all my students deserve a world-class education is what drives me.”

Zarate originally taught 5th to 8th graders at Brighton Park, and this year his original group of 5th graders will be graduating. “Seeing their growth academically, and as people, really motivates me to keep pushing myself in the classroom,” said Zarate.

"From day one of year one, Anthony has had a clear, ambitious vision for what his students could achieve, and his students are clearly bought in. The daily evidence of students’ investment in reaching their goals—as much in the doldrums of February as on the first day of school-- is a special thing to witness," said Luke Corry, Master Teacher at UCSN Brighton Park.
About the Illinois Teacher of the Year: The Illinois State Board of Education annually sponsors Those Who Excel to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to our state’s public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools. Excellence, Meritorious Service and Special Recognition awards are presented in seven categories. Awards of Excellence winners in the classroom teacher category are finalists for the Illinois Teacher of the Year. Local school district leaders and members of school communities nominate candidates.

About UCSN: The UNO Charter School Network (UCSN) is one of the largest charter school networks in Chicago, serving approximately 8,000 students and their families through thirteen elementary schools and three high schools. It is focused on improving and transforming communities by challenging students, parents, and faculty to reach the highest of academic standards. At UCSN, academic success is not hope; it is an expectation.

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