



Spotlight

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District
Volume XVIII ★ May, 2003

Spotlight

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Auditioning for the Role

What does it mean to be an exemplary teacher? One definition can be found in the district's *Portrait of a CFISD Teacher*, which describes these characteristics.

- Instructional Strategist
- Creator of Student-centered Environment
- Positive Role Model
- Lifelong Learner
- Team Player

Shining the Spotlight

CFISD's annual Spotlight program, now in its 18th year, is the district's way of recognizing our classroom teachers who demonstrate these qualities day-in and day-out to make a difference in the lives of our students. Though each campus has a full cast and crew of star-quality performers, **Spotlight** allows each principal to select one teacher to be in the spotlight, center stage, so that we may honor that individual's performance.

Designing the Set

This publication is set up as an informal sharing of real-life stories. Sometimes, when our lives are bombarded by volumes of paper, information, reports, and other impersonal data, a personal story can have a powerful impact for reminding us that we are not dealing with statistics, but with human beings—children—and that each one is special.

Reading the Script

The narratives that follow were submitted by the 2003 **Spotlight** teachers, who were asked to choose one of the five dimensions of the Portrait and relate a personal “success story” from their experiences as a teacher or *because of a teacher*. The stories relate

- how the teachers developed these qualities in themselves or
- how these qualities observed in someone else provided personal or professional inspiration.

Some honorees recount childhood memories from their own days as students, while some describe pivotal moments in their careers involving especially memorable students, colleagues, or events. We hope you will be entertained and inspired by these insights from our teachers honored in this year's **Spotlight**.

Instructional Strategist

A CFISD teacher is an *instructional strategist* who thoughtfully designs learning and assessment activities which present the depth and breadth of content appropriate for students' age and aptitude and which promote students' actively thinking about the subject—the learners' engagement coming from personal connections, curiosity, challenge, and real-world applications.

The Gift of Reading

Karen Bjork-Comer • Lowery Elementary School
Special Education Teacher

I am most proud and satisfied when I can help a child learn to read. The ability to read—and read well—is the basis for all future learning. In spite of a student's learning disability, I strive to employ instructional strategies that will guarantee reading success and, thus, contribute to that child's quality of life.

I have always felt equipped to educate children who have disabilities related to language and learning. My education from Hardin-Simmons University in the field of speech pathology prepared me to help students increase their use of language and develop a strong sense of phonemic awareness—sure indicators of a child's reading proficiency. My master's degree from the University of Arizona provided me with the ability to serve my children with prescriptive

teaching strategies specifically designed to fit their educational needs. In 1999, I was chosen to teach children with characteristics of dyslexia. I attended an intense, 70-hour workshop involving the Dyslexia Intervention Program. The knowledge presented in this highly structured program, combined with my educational background and a very supportive administration, has enabled me to empower my students with skills and strategies that give them the gift of reading.

The highlights of my teaching career are those moments when children receive the gift of reading and genuinely realize that reading for both pleasure and knowledge is a skill that they have mastered and can treasure for the rest of their lives.

A Lasting Impression

Lilia Salinas Chumley • Matzke Elementary School
5th Grade • Math and Science

When I began my teaching career in 1994, I entered the profession with much enthusiasm. Throughout the years I have managed to carry that enthusiasm over to my students. Using the knowledge that I have gained attending workshops and seminars, I have learned to be selective with teaching strategies, and I have become known for adding my own "creativity" to help enhance a lesson to fit the needs of students.

Having been an active child myself, I understand the importance of making children an

active part of their own learning experience. I am a person with a very "orange" temperament, very much like my students, so there is never a dull moment in my classroom.

My students know the topic we will learn about, but how it is presented is always different. Whether it's preparing for a lab in science, suddenly breaking into song to teach an objective, or having my students simultaneously take notes while enjoying a PowerPoint presentation on an otherwise-boring topic, I always try to give my students something

concrete to help them remember a difficult concept.

It is always nice to hear a low moan when I announce that our class time is up. To me, that just verifies that my students are having fun while being actively engaged in their learning. I know that I will have touched and made a difference for at least one year in my students' lives, but what

happens after that I may never know. So, in May when my students ask if I'll go to the middle school with them, or when a former student says I made a difference in his or her life, I feel that what I'm doing in class today is making a lasting impression in their young lives. That makes me very proud to be a teacher!

Making a Difference, One by One

Sheri J. Cowart • Cook Middle School

7th Grade • Math

During the recent Teacher Appreciation Week, many of our students at Cook wrote letters expressing gratitude to their teachers. As I thought back upon previous years and other letters I had received, the letter from Amber* definitely stood out in my mind.

Amber was an at-risk student who had not met with success in math for many years. During the year she was in my class, there were many times when I felt that I had not reached her at all or taught her anything. When I read her letter, she said that, although she wished she had worked harder, she had still learned so much in my class. She thanked me for not ever giving up on her and for caring about her. She told me that she really liked math now and no longer “feared” going to class. She expressed that the math activities were fun and helped her to understand some “hard” concepts.

I firmly believe that Amber's new attitude toward math was directly attributable to the lessons that were tailor-made for and targeted directly to students like her. As an instructional strategist, I am proud to have taken most of the curriculum, lessons, tests, labs, and other activities that I use in my classroom and personalized them, a process that enables me to

ensure deep alignment and to adapt the pace to meet the diverse needs of my students, including those like Amber.

I love to create activities! It is fun! It is a challenge to write lessons and activities that present concepts in a logical, sequential, and understandable manner. I can combine mathematical concepts and skills to make connections to real-world applications. I can ensure that students' thinking rises above the knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's Taxonomy to focus on underlying relationships as they analyze, evaluate, and interpret.

There is an old, well-known story about a man who was walking along a beach. He sees a young boy near the water's edge throwing stranded starfish, one by one, back into the ocean. The man looks at the thousands of stranded starfish all along the miles and miles of beach, and he tells the young boy that his actions cannot possibly make any difference.

But the young boy just turns, picks up yet another starfish, throws it into the ocean, and says, “But it makes a difference to that one.”

It did to Amber, too.

** Not the student's real name.*

Making It Understandable

Sandra Hardie • Horne Elementary School

4th Grade • ESL Reading/Language Arts, Social Studies

School was often very difficult for me growing up. My troubles ranged from having a speech problem to having difficulty understanding certain concepts when the instructor taught them only *one way*, with no exceptions. Such adversities

left me with an assortment of grades that did not always impress my parents and created in me mixed emotions about the whole idea of school. By the time I graduated from college with a degree in education, I was determined to help

children learn ideas successfully by using a *variety* of methods.

My first interview was at Horne Elementary, which I fell in love with from the beginning due to the enormously supportive staff. The only catch to my dream job was that it was a fourth-grade ESL class. How was I supposed to reach 22 students with varying needs?

Once out of college, I had a goal to start small and expand. School started, and I was scared. It was definitely a learning experience on both sides. I learned that my students were at varied levels of instruction, and my students learned that I needed to help them all become successful

fourth-grade students ready for the TAAS/TAKS writing and reading tests.

We all struggled that first year as we experimented with numerous ideas and techniques. The students were always changing, growing, and, yes, understanding concepts that would help them to succeed. These results were achieved by using a lot of visuals, pictures, and manipulatives—and numerous, varied instructional techniques for each concept.

This year is my fourth to teach ESL Reading/Language Arts and Social Studies, and I would not wish for any other job.

The Making of a Math Teacher

Kathy Stokan • Truitt Middle School

6th Grade • Mathematics

I have always enjoyed math. I found it incredibly easy as a child, and I continued to enjoy it throughout school. Math was my favorite subject, and I even enjoyed Calculus in college—enough to go to study sessions for fun. Then, all these feelings changed during my sophomore year in college when I took Linear Algebra.

I soon found myself thinking about abandoning my lifelong goal of being a math teacher because this required class was so hard for me. Fortunately, in this same class I also met the teacher who possessed the inspiring qualities that make me the math teacher I am today. He was extremely tough and demanding, yet he wanted desperately for all of us to be successful. He offered us unlimited office hours, and he was always so anxious to help. He was brilliant, yet he had compassion, and he went that extra mile for each of his students.

I realize that it was important for me to have struggled at math in order to know what it feels

like not to have all the answers. Most importantly, I felt how much of an impact it was on me to have a teacher who cared so much that I did well and who went that extra distance for me.

I often recall the time when I took a particularly difficult test and left class in tears. One can only imagine the relief that I felt when he called me at the dorm that same afternoon to inform me that I had done well on the test.

From that experience, I learned how important it is to have immediate feedback, and—to this day—I always do my best to have my students' papers graded and returned to them the next day. I fondly remember how much time and care he put into teaching his students, and, as a result, I try to make sure that my students know how much I care about them and how I want all of them to do well. I also try to be available whenever they need help.

Thank you, Dr. Pazirandeh!

I Loathed Science—That's Why I Teach It!

Laurie E. Westphal • Thornton Middle School

8th grade I.P.C. • Webmastering • ESL Science

In my small hometown, there was no question that at least 90 percent of the students in my high school hated science, myself included. Science meant reading out of the textbook, outlining the chapter, and answering section reviews.

Although we did do labs from time to time, they never made any sense and seemed unrelated to anything else in our high school lives.

I was ecstatic at graduation to be finished with science. When I left for college, I was excited

finally to do what I enjoyed. I planned to major in Spanish and emulate the wonderful Spanish teacher I had had for four years in high school. My bubble burst, however, my freshman year of college when I discovered that I would have to suffer through Chemistry I. How could they do this to a Spanish major? So, wanting to get it over with as quickly and painlessly as possible, I took it immediately. I trudged to class that first day, sunk into my seat, and stoically took out my notebook, ready to do battle.

That was when Dr. Keene made his entrance. Rather than beginning his lecture, he asked us to find a person near us and discuss for five minutes examples of chemistry we had experienced before class that day. Now, what was this—chemistry in my life, on a daily basis? Surely you jest!

I was not the only one confused by this request. Where were the outlines, the notes, the lectures? Well, those would come in Dr. Keene's class, but all of them were preceded, interrupted, and followed up with real-life applications and lots of stories! Science seemed to be actually (Could it be?) interesting and applicable to my life.

I went to see Dr. Keene, who was also the head of the chemistry department, the last week of Chem. I. I wanted him to know that by sharing his experiences and relating chemistry to real life, he actually made me like the subject without even

realizing it. When I shared with him that I was going to be a secondary Spanish teacher, he suggested the wildest idea on earth. He asked if I would switch majors.

It angered him that so many students came to college hating science when it was one of the few subjects we experience every moment of our lives. He suggested that we needed more teachers who would apply science to real life, share stories, and make science fun. I had studied Spanish too long to switch majors, but I was willing to add chemistry as long as he promised to mentor me through the program. (After all, I was only a recent convert to enjoying science.)

Dr. Keene was wonderful, and he did help me through all four years of my chemistry major. I may not have seen him every day, but he always stopped me when he saw me, inquiring if I was still enjoying my classes. Most importantly, he wanted assurance that I was going to go out into the field and teach science the way it should be taught. I am happy to say that, even though I have my teaching certificates for both Spanish and science, I have taught only science for 13 years now. Thanks to Dr. Keene, I try to make all the concepts I teach my students relevant and interesting. If I had not trudged into his class all those years ago, I would still probably hate science.

Creator of Student-centered Environment

A CFISD teacher is a *creator of a student-centered environment* who provides a caring, supportive classroom in which students are workers and doers, comfortable in taking risks to further their learning.

Ooh-La-La!

Laurie M. Aldridge • Hamilton Elementary School
Kindergarten-5th Grade • Physical Education

In 1987 I attended my first ARD committee meeting. It was for a sweet little boy in kindergarten who obviously had a certain something about him. A diagnosis of autism was determined, which dealt quite a blow to his parents. I remember this vividly because I was the parent, and that sweet little boy was my own son Patrick.

Through Patrick, I have learned patience, appreciation of learning styles, understanding, hard work, organization, consistency, humor, routine, empathy, and the joy in simple and profound successes.

In my teaching I incorporate these skills to create a caring, supportive and comfortable class for my diverse group of students. On any given day in the gym, a student's perfect push-up, thoughtful gesture, or spirit of teamwork can receive an "ooh-la-la!" from me. Within this environment, students are provided an opportunity to challenge themselves and be their personal best.

It's now 2003. Patrick is in college, and I am being honored as a Spotlight teacher. Ooh-la-la!

Mrs. Frizzle Lives!

Linda Bonham • Lamkin Elementary School
5th Grade • Language Arts and Social Studies

"You get what you give." I live this statement daily, and the rewards are outstanding.

All classrooms are dependent on the ability of the teachers to foster growth—growth in students and in themselves. Teachers are "people facilitators," and we have the responsibility of developing quality individuals and leaders for our future. I have an idea of what I want our future to be like, and I am a true believer in the idea of "you reap what you sow."

My classroom is often referred to affectionately as the "magic school bus" (after PBS's animated science show for kids), and everyone involved in the room is a driver. In case you are wondering, yes, I am lovingly called "Ms. Frizzle." I think it has something to do with the blonde curly hair

and the thematic clothing I wear, including the cockroach earrings.

Walk into our class at any time, and the climate is warm, supportive, fun, humorous (I am famous for my knee-slappers), enthusiastic, respectful, and fair. Like a family, we treat each other as we would want to be treated, an approach that creates a very safe place where we all grow together. Our class is very flexible—often the lesson drifts to a "teachable moment." Sometimes I find myself learning as much from the students as they are learning from me. In particular, I have learned how it feels to succeed and believe in myself as a person and a teacher.

As a child, I had low self-esteem. I was very quiet and never asked questions for fear of being

wrong and being humiliated. No one ever found my “spark” in the classroom. I sat still and dark. I never explored all the ideas in my head or took a chance on living outside the acceptable “box” we are all measured against as students.

Then I became a teacher. I believe I am a teacher because I wanted to light those sparks inside others and let them shine—which is exactly what happens in my classroom. My students know beyond a doubt that they are special to me! I encourage them to ask questions, letting them know by my words and actions that all questions are okay. They are inspired to take chances and find strength in their mistakes. I teach that we learn from our mistakes.

From the first day of school, I reveal stories, pictures, and facts about myself. Some of these stories are embarrassing, silly, and sad. As students understand the vulnerability inherent in sharing these special memories, they recognize that I am genuine. My self-disclosure establishes an atmosphere that allows my students to begin relating to each other, and trust begins to develop. This trust has enabled many students in my classroom to succeed and find their light. They all affect me, but a few will remain in my heart and spirit forever.

A specific math student brings joy to my heart and tears to my eyes when I reflect on our year together. I met this student prior to the first day of school. He sat in the library, head down and quiet. When I was introduced, he looked as though all the light had been drained from him, as if there were no spark to be found. As I worked with him, along with a co-teacher who shares in my excitement for teaching, this student became a star. I ran into his mother the next year and was thrilled to hear that he was making A's and B's in middle school.

Another success story is a third grader who was in the process of being identified as learning disabled. By the time the “red tape” cleared and all the signatures were copied, he had reached his target reading level and no longer needed a resource class for reading. This progress would not have been possible without a phenomenal volunteer—who, by the way, was 72 years old and still full of spark. He and I instilled a love for reading in this student.

Then there are the students in my life who face adversities that would snuff the flame of anyone. With little to no support at home and minimal success at school, these fifth-grade students came to me from the same still and quiet place I knew so well. Hopeless and feeling like failures, they had never passed the TAAS test. We worked, talked, shared, and laughed all year. Again, I was fortunate to have a talented paraprofessional assist me in the classroom. The day of the TAAS test arrived, and these students came in with smiles on their faces and confidence in their hearts. They applied their test-taking strategies, believed in themselves, and persevered by passing the TAAS test. I still cry when I tell the story of the success of these students. By giving an abundance of positive feedback and praise and remembering that each student is an individual, teachers can motivate all students to learn and to be successful.

Thanks to the trust, respect, and faith my students have in me, I aspire to continue teaching and to light many more lives along the way. So to new and upcoming teachers I say, “Capture their hearts and raise their confidence with praise, praise, praise. You will always come away with more than you have given!”

From Caterpillars to Butterflies

Lisa Bremer • Copeland Elementary School

Kindergarten

Each of my students is special, whether he or she carries an educational label such as gifted, meets the daily challenges posed by a physical disability, or fulfills the role of the “cutie” with the big, beautiful eyes. Taking each of my unique “babies” through one full year’s growth is an adventure because each one comes into my class with a different level of learning.

It is for this reason I live in the student-centered environment called kindergarten. Some children arrive already knowing numbers, letters, and high-frequency words, while others come not knowing how to hold a pencil; however, each one comes wanting and expecting to learn something—anything.

This year my distinctive challenge is a student who performs at an advanced level in both math and language arts. Instructing that student on how to socialize with peer groups, how to make friends, and how to be a friend is a real test of teaching. Yet, with the support of the administrative staff, not only in my building but district-wide, I have resources made available to

me, and I have the opportunity to confront these difficulties and make changes happen within my classroom.

Every year I start out with small, unsure little caterpillars, and in May I release bright, beautiful butterflies. Teaching kindergarten is a career I have enjoyed for 10 years, and I look forward to teaching for many more.

Living a Dream

Jeff Clary • Campbell Middle School
8th Grade • Integrated Physics & Chemistry

I remember, early in my career, telling my principal that I ought to be paying the *district* for allowing me to come to school each day and be entertained by the young people with whom I worked. All the happiness, sorrow, joy, and tears of any good movie or television program occur each day under the roof of our school. I simply try to carve a small space in my room where I can fit in and channel some of the students' energy toward the curriculum I am charged with teaching.

As I approach each day, I think to myself, "Is today going to be fun?" In fact, the first year I was a team leader, I told my team that having fun was a top priority.

Ask most middle school students why they are in the classroom, and very few will answer that they are there to learn. They are there because they have to be there. My challenge is to engage them in fun learning experiences during that mandated time in my room.

From the very first day, I try to approach them with the bizarre, the challenging, and the exciting. If I am bored, then they must be miserable. If I am having fun, then it is likely that they are, too. And if they are having fun, then maybe, just maybe, they will learn something by accident!

There is still so much to do for my students. I really love the kids. Wow—I guess I am living my dream!

Believing

Kathleen Covey • Millsap Elementary School
4th Grade

"Treat children the way you want to be treated," were the wise words of my first principal, Nancy Sampson. I have based my 20-year career on those words, and my reward is knowing that I have sent children out believing in themselves and having confidence in their ability to make good choices.

As each school year begins, I continue to be delighted by the number of former students who return to visit me. They may come from nearby classrooms or from middle schools, high schools, and beyond. They want to share what's going on in their lives, find out what's going on with me, check out the newest animal from the Science Resource Center, or just grab a hug and say, "Hello." These visits confirm my belief that when students are loved and respected for their own

unique personalities, they will respond with respect and affection for their teachers, as well as for their peers.

I consider it my duty to teach "beyond" the textbooks. Working collaboratively through a multi-sensory approach fosters learning and promotes problem-solving strategies for real-life situations. The variety of experiences that my children have with animals in my classroom teaches the students responsibility and respect for life, and it provides an opportunity to examine the innate curiosity in all of us.

Teaching has been an inspiration and a dream fulfilled. The inspiration came from my mom and aunt, and my dream has been fulfilled through the love and unconditional support of my husband, sons, friends, and colleagues.

Don't Be Swallowed Up

Rachel DiAngelo • Bane Elementary School
1st Grade

My mother once told me a story that has influenced my attitude both as a mother and as a teacher. The story tells of two seeds lying side by side in the soil.

The first seed couldn't wait to grow. It was anxious to put its roots into the soil and begin the process of rebirth. It wanted to announce the arrival of spring by displaying its beautiful blossoms. The seed couldn't wait to feel the warmth of the sun and the morning dew on its petals.

The second seed was afraid. It didn't want to send its roots into the ground because it did not know what it would encounter in the dark. The seed was also afraid that, if it pushed its way through the hard soil, it would damage its delicate sprouts. The seed worried about snails eating it if it opened its buds and about children pulling it from the ground if it opened its blossoms. The

second seed decided that it would be better to wait until it was safe. And so it waited.

One day in early spring, a hen was pecking around, looking for food. It came across the waiting seed and quickly ate it. I can hear my mother to this very day, saying, "Rachel, don't be swallowed up by life. You always need to be a risk-taker."

I now am a mother of 19 children (two of them are biological, and the other 17 are my students). I try to instill in them the importance of taking risks every day. By providing a caring, supportive classroom, I hope to create a comfortable environment in which my students are able to take risks to further their learning. Thanks, Mom, for helping me teach such a vital lesson: "Those of us who refuse to risk and grow get swallowed up by life."

Hugs and Knots

Dana B. Farley • Holbrook Elementary School
5th Grade • Math

In my 27 years of teaching, I have attended numerous days of staff development, completed one advanced degree, and will soon complete another. In all these hours of training, two programs have made an impact on my teaching more than everything else combined. These two programs are Capturing Kids' Hearts and Reality Oriented Physical Experiences (or "ROPES").

I teach on a campus that has a significant proportion of students considered to be "at-risk." As I follow the Capturing Kids' Hearts curriculum, my day starts with a verbal greeting and a handshake for each of my students. I strive to let my students know that I am much more than just the person who will teach them math that day—I am the person who

- cares whether they had breakfast that morning,
- is concerned about whether their household was calm (not violent) the night before, and

- is interested in what might be on their minds that would hinder their learning in my classroom that day.

In other words, I strive to form a relationship and bond with my students. M.B. "Flip" Flippen (author of the Capturing Kids' Hearts program) says, "You have to capture their hearts before you can capture their minds." I am a very strong believer in this philosophy because I've seen it work.

One day a student was especially rowdy and seemed to be having a very difficult time getting started with his academic assignment. Finally, I took him out in the hall, shook his hand, and inquired why he was having a problem settling down. He looked up at me, made eye contact, and said, "I didn't get my morning hug from you today." After a great big, tight squeeze, the student was able to continue with the math lesson with acceptable behavior. This is just one of many successes that I have seen because of my

adopting the principles taught through this wonderful curriculum.

Capturing Kids' Hearts and ROPES go hand-in-hand. ROPES is a type of obstacle course designed to foster students' teamwork, trust, and confidence. During ROPES, as students support each other while attempting the individual challenges, they are trained to treat others in the same respectful way they wish to be treated, to work together as a team, and to speak only positively about each other. It is amazing to watch these young people bond with each other on the ROPES course in a way that traditional

school settings don't always allow. It is also exciting to watch children accomplish things they never thought possible. Just as a knot in a rope can be life-saving, the "knots" of teamwork, respect, and personal challenges can provide handholds that these students can rely on throughout life.

I am forever changed because I learned the value of hugs and "knots." This knowledge has enhanced the way I work with my students, and I have been able to extend these valuable lessons far beyond the classroom.

Balanced Literacy

Beth Haines • Moore Elementary School

2nd Grade • ESL • Reading/Language Arts and Social Studies

Last year a representative from the Rigby publishing company inspired me to restructure my classroom using a balanced literacy approach. I learned to create student-centered activities that incorporate several learning strategies.

At the beginning of the year, we read *Take Me Out of the Bathtub* during shared reading. We then rewrote the song to "Take Me Out to the Playground." After posting it on the wall in the reading center, the students flocked to their work and sang it over and over. Because the activity was student-centered, they felt ownership in their writing and were engaged in learning.

Another strategy that I implemented was shared reading. I enjoy seeing the kids get excited about our shared reading time. One week we were reading *No Queen Today*, and several

parts required them to speak like a queen. It tickled me to hear them adjust their tone of voice to sound like royalty...even the boys! It is so rewarding to know that the learning process can be fun!

I also created learning stations that involved problem-solving skills and real-life situations. Instead of choosing children for classroom duties, I had them fill out job application forms at the writing center. We discussed the importance of writing neatly and correctly. Each week they look forward to finding out if they have been hired for the job.

Implementing the balanced literacy program has invigorated me as a teacher and improved the learning environment in my classroom.

A Teachable Moment

Carolyn L. Harris • Carlton Pre-vocational Center

9th-12th Grades • Commercial Foods

After having worked one year with the ABLE students at Carlton (ABLE stands for academics, behavior, life skills, and employability skills.), I was given the opportunity to work in the Commercial Foods class. For each class period of this vocational course, I teach 10 students whose disabilities are serious and numerous.

I was excited but a little hesitant to take on such a big responsibility. Not only did I have to meet the needs of the students, but also I had to

keep up with the demands of handling classroom earnings and expenditures.

Being determined to put my students first, I focused on each one's individualized education plan and started to turn my vision into action. My goal was to ensure that each student would function on an independent level and acquire skills that could lead to gainful employment.

One student, Jay*, caused me some concern. He was challenged with mental retardation and a

speech impairment. He was unable to read, write, or identify any numbers. Jay would become frustrated when asked to begin a task relating to numbers. Lacking the skills to display his frustrations appropriately, Jay used behavior that interfered with learning. Along with my classroom paraprofessional, I implemented a variety of strategies to help Jay acquire the skills he needed. I began to see progress in his daily activities and a development of independence.

At the end of the two-year program, Jay— independently—was able to identify and write numbers. This accomplishment was a great one for both Jay *and* me. Because of my efforts (and

the efforts of my paraprofessional), this one student had developed vocational skills that he could use to survive in the real world after high school.

Jay's story reminded me of a college professor who used the phrase, "Each one, teach one." This professor taught me that each student comes with unique learning requirements. Master teachers are able to facilitate experiences that are motivating and encouraging while addressing the specific needs of each student.

** Not the student's real name.*

Guide My Steps Please, Then Walk With Me

Colleen D. Haynes • Hancock Elementary School
1st Grade • Math, Science, and Social Studies

An educator, one who loves to observe the learning paths of children, knows that learning happens over time—moment to moment, month to month, or year to year. The rewards of an educator's observations are those "aha" moments that exhilarate the learner or those distinct instances of reflective or "remembering when" learning. At the "aha" moment, a child's eyes will shine brightly with an expression of knowledge and satisfaction.

In contrast, the child's eyes that are shadowed with an expression of confusion or misunderstanding also beckon the teacher. A teacher must recognize both expressions to facilitate a child's learning path. It is this very expression that a child reflects back to the teacher that says either, "I'm ready to walk. Come along with me as I challenge myself," or "Guide me further along the path. Steady my way."

My experiences with children have also happened over time. I have had my own guides who have steadied my way along the teaching path. I'm sure they are the same as some of yours. Many gifted educators over time have contributed to the design of children's success. Many parents have supported and enriched their children's lives so that these students become the avant-garde, the stimulus in the classroom, for critical learning.

Yes, even those difficult, seemingly-beyond-reach children challenge educators to reach deep inside to find a solution—which is a rewarding result. In essence, teaching depends on every child's having a guided path that opens itself to a colorful, imaginatively distinctive, and purposeful world. It is rewarding to guide a path and then to feel the hand that grasps yours to walk along for a lifetime.

The Opening of the Gift

Jessica Hernandez • Kirk Elementary School
5th Grade • Bilingual/Structured English Immersion
Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies

Emma Lazarus's famous poem "The New Colossus" has a calling for the tired, the poor, and the homeless. If those words sound familiar, you may remember that the poem is displayed at the Statue of Liberty.

My personal calling in Cy-Fair I.S.D. is for the low-performing, the misunderstood, and the unruly. The characteristics of such children encourage me as a teacher to help seek "the gift" that each holds within. My immediate response is

to face the challenges of these individuals. My goal is to take what appears in front of me and develop the potential that makes each student unique.

One might ask, “How on earth can a teacher make an impact on such children?” My answer is that each hard-to-reach student holds a “gift,” which, with my guidance, he is just waiting to open.

I use a multitude of intervention strategies as I strive to build strong relationships with my students. I know it doesn’t happen overnight, but, with much time and patience, they see my devotion, and we succeed. If there is one word that sums up my approach, it would be “consistency.” I don’t know that the students appreciate it, but I become part of their lives in

many ways—academically, behaviorally, and personally.

Over my five years of teaching I can name several “rewards.” These shining faces are the same ones who had to come by every morning for the “I know you’ll do well today” pep-talk. They are the same ones who return years later to tell me, “Ms., I’m better because you never let go.” Even now, I let them know, “I still haven’t.”

I often reflect on people in my life who have helped me succeed, and I eagerly try to fulfill that same role for my students. I want them to reflect on their own successes, just as I have done. As my “rewards” continue to grow every day, each one stands strong in the belief that he is his own person, both in school and throughout life.

A Blast from the Past

Donna L. Holle • Labay Middle School

7th–8th Grades • Keyboarding

Some students don’t like school and don’t want to be in class. These students don’t “buy into” what’s going on in the classroom. I try to create an atmosphere in my classroom that will allow students to learn the required information and not feel threatened.

I want each student to remember school as a positive experience. I try to address my students by name when I see them in the hallway. They soon realize that I know and remember them, and they begin to speak to me. I enjoy seeing a look of self-validation when I ask students about themselves or talk with them about their interests.

It’s always enjoyable to see former students, find out that they remember me, and listen as they tell me how much they use the skills they acquired while in my classroom. It’s great when I’m dodging baskets in Target to hear, “Hey, Mrs. Holle.” It’s usually one of my former students, eager to share with me how he’s been doing and how his keyboarding skills helped him get a better summer job. After 35 years, I only wish that it were as easy to recall their names as it used to be!

Learning Can Be Fun

Karen L. Johnson • Holmsley Elementary School

5th Grade • Math

A very special teacher named Miss Cade inspired my desire for learning and my zeal for passing my new-found knowledge along to others. She took special interest in me and allowed me to develop and exercise a passion for helping the other students in my second-grade class.

Many people, through workshops, conferences and seminars, have been instrumental in helping me develop the strategies I need to challenge,

motivate, and inspire children. Using concrete objects to understand math concepts has been a very powerful tool. Working in small groups helps children to personalize lessons. The students enjoy using games and learning stations to practice math in a “fun” way. Decorating T-shirts and aprons with math concepts, singing a song, or doing a cheer are strategies that focus students in new and exciting ways.

The children and I both love it when I dress up as "Aunt Sally," adding a diversion and heightening interest. Some of them are not really sure that it actually is I under my costume, even at the end of the day-long masquerade.

Last year, when two of my students nominated me for Disney teacher of the year, I felt that

perhaps I was passing along the legacy that Miss Cade had left to me. My students want to learn, and I trust that they will want to pass that learning on to others as well. I am so very honored and blessed by the Lord to be the Spotlight Teacher representing such a fine school as Holmsley Elementary.

"Very Smart" Students

Susan Lavelle • Alternative Learning Center

6th-8th Grades • Math

Teaching at the Alternative Learning Center is very rewarding and very challenging. New students from diverse backgrounds arrive twice weekly, and others leave just when I feel that they are becoming independent thinkers. In the short time these students are with me, I challenge and motivate them to become competent problem-solvers both in mathematics and in their daily lives.

First impressions are important in establishing a student-centered classroom. A strong handshake, a smile, and inquiries about a student's home campus, family, or interests create a personal connection with each student. This connection is just as important as instituting firm, consistent rules, and it establishes a close rapport between teacher and students.

Praise and encouragement are equally important at the ALC, because many of our

students have never experienced success.

Recently, I had an ESL student who had been in class several days and had never spoken, so I mistakenly assumed that he couldn't speak English. As I leaned over his desk to check his progress, I commented, "You're smart, aren't you!" He looked in my eyes and replied in perfect English, "Yes, Miss. I am very smart." From that moment on, he would proudly state, "See, Miss, I am smart," each time I returned an assignment.

In my classroom, all students are "very smart." They are encouraged not only by me, but also by their classmates to contribute their thoughts and ideas. Their work is proudly displayed on my classroom walls so every student knows that he or she is important. I share their pride, something which gives me the inspiration to continue teaching.

Everything I Needed to Know about Teaching I Learned from Kids

Renee Mai • Yeager Elementary School

5th Grade • Language Arts • Gifted & Talented • Bilingual

Everything I needed to know about teaching I learned from kids. You're right. I didn't learn how to diagram predicate adjectives or how to solve equations with two variables from my students, but I did learn everything important from them.

Steve* taught me how important it is for me to convey the message that I believe in his success. He made sure I understood that he would perform to whatever my expectations were for him.

Julie taught me that what goes on at home matters. I learned from her that real learning takes place only after basic needs are met. She

showed me that I needed to make school the safe place to be.

Aaron taught me that I need to be prepared for students who already know what I want to teach. He taught me that I must stretch as a teacher and find ways to let kids dig deeper into concepts and problems than my original lesson designs may have called for. He taught me not to get in his way by squeezing him into my plan.

Elliott taught me that some kids need to hear content in several ways. Sometimes they even

need to hear it from each other. He also taught me to let him know, often, when he gets it right.

James taught me that even the quiet kids have something to say. It may be harder to open the jar, but, once it is opened, it is difficult to put the lid back on.

Melissa taught me that I don't always have to stick to my plan. Spontaneous detours can throw

a teacher, but they can also make a lesson real and meaningful to kids. Sometimes those lessons aren't tested on TAKS, but they are meaningful just the same.

Basically, the more I relate to my students, the more I learn how to teach them.

**Students' real names were not used in this story.*

Music Motivates!

Julie Marczak • Emmott Elementary School
Kindergarten-5th Grade • Music

Childhood memories of my little brother yelling over the car radio (and over my singing) flood my mind. He would exclaim, "Mom! Make her stop singing! She doesn't even know all the words!"

I would sing softly awhile, and then, when the chorus came back, I would be belting it out again, just *knowing* that I was going to be the next Karen Carpenter.

The time came for me to pick electives for sixth grade. I had no other desire but music. I tried to sign up for the viola and then the flute, but they were both too expensive. I decided I should sign up for choir. The only cost to my parents would be the material for the choir dress. You know the saying, "When God closes a door, somewhere He opens a window."

That window was wide open, and I flew out! I am supposed to be a teacher. I know this from

the depths of my soul. It is my treasured responsibility to guide children into understanding and creating, without fear, this wonderful gift to mankind—music.

The students can trust that in the environment I've created, there are no mistakes, only happy accidents! I see children working with each other to create simple melodies and rhythms to complex compositions. This atmosphere of cooperative support and mutual respect engages and motivates all types of learners, no matter what "baggage" they bring into the music room. From the inquiries ("Can we do it again?") to the exclamations ("We were so good!"), I know my students leave my room with a sense of success.

I teach lifelong skills. I teach music.

The Caped Grammarian Strikes Again

Pamela McAneny • Hamilton Middle School
6th Grade • Language Arts and Reading

"Well, Mrs. Mac, you certainly presented *that* lesson with voice!" This declaration, believe it or not, came from one of my sixth-grade students following an introductory lesson on subject/object pronouns. In spite of the tongue-in-cheek delivery, I was thrilled with his reaction. Passion, enthusiasm, and relevance are the cornerstones of my teaching philosophy.

We are instructing an information-age generation. Students ask important questions and expect relevant answers. "How can I use this later?" "What difference will this make in my life?" I feel strongly that these questions deserve answers and that it is my duty to supply effective

responses. If those of us with a passion for language do not communicate its importance, who will?

As I teach my students that knowing the mechanics of grammar and writing will make a significant impact on their lives, I share letters to the editor and newspaper articles that regale and admonish the misuse of pronouns by celebrities including former President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush. The importance of correct grammar to effective communication is clearly illustrated by these real-life examples.

My students are aware that, in the event they become famous, it is I, Mrs. McAneny, who will

have prevented them from making a grammatical gaffe. If not, their sixth-grade language arts teacher may as well have been named “Mrs. Whatsit.”

My colleagues have noted my passion for the English language as well; rumor has it that the “Caped Grammarian of Hamilton” spends her free time repainting all the “Toys R Us” signs to say “Toys R We.”

...And We Have to Learn This *Because*...?

Terry Noe • Goodson Middle School

8th Grade • U.S. History • Social Studies Department Chair

What teacher has not heard this question and cringed? A good teacher makes the reasons for learning apparent in every lesson that he or she teaches, something which is not easy to do. History is one of those subjects that makes teachers really have to work hard to bring out the relevance to students’ lives.

We all sat through some pretty bad classes when we were in school. “Read the book and answer the questions...test next Friday.” The content had no relevance to our lives. I, however, have the privilege of teaching “the story of us”—who we are and why we do the things we do.

I love to bring in the “common” side of history. I feel that this component is a key to making history interesting—finding out how the everyday people lived their lives. I try to bring in stories about the day-to-day struggles of the people and how the “big” events of the past affected people. Middle school students like those sorts of stories, especially the really “gross stuff.” I love it when the kids come back to school after they’ve gone home and told their parents some of the stories I shared with them in class.

More importantly, I have the honor of showing the students that they, too, can rise to meet a

challenge. I try to show my students how simple, common people, by rising to their challenges throughout history, forever changed the world. Too often, our Founding Fathers are presented as though they were deities. That standard is a tough one to have to live up to.

I want my students to know that these people were average, ordinary folks who just happened to live in extraordinary times. I want my students to know that they also have the capability to do great things. I challenge students to look at the circumstances around historical events and relate them to events in our lives today. It has often been said that history repeats itself. By bringing in the everyday, human side of history, I am hopeful that we can learn from the mistakes of the past so that our students can improve upon our future.

I like to start the year by telling students that my class will be the most challenging class they ever loved. Often I just get blank stares in return (remember, it’s still early in the year, so they don’t say anything back). By the end of the year, the students will tell you that I did indeed challenge them, and, I hope, more than a few will tell you that they loved my class.

Gifts

Sheryl Qualls • Reed Elementary School

Kindergarten

As a kindergarten teacher, I get the unique privilege of opening the “gate of learning” for many young children. I view this opportunity as both a blessing and a gift; and I feel so fortunate to be doing something that I love. Gifts are to be shared, and the joy I receive from being with these children is one gift I strive to return to them.

I want students to feel that school is a happy and safe place to be. My students are actively

involved—dancing, chanting, singing, rhyming, and, above all, laughing! By interjecting songs, dances, and general silliness into the day, I try to create a comfortable, accepting environment in which children can take risks and learn. Creating stories, dramatizing, and providing hands-on experiences challenge students and foster a “can-do” attitude. It all comes together when a child

proudly announces he can read a page or when another uses her free time to write me a letter.

When a student writes, he is an author. When a student builds, she is an architect. When a student shares his work with the class, he is a proud orator. To quote Don Murray, "When I am teaching, I want my students to know how smart

they are!" When children leave my classroom, they have self-confidence. I make sure they believe they are able to accomplish anything. They see themselves as readers, writers, mathematicians, and scientists. That is the greatest gift I can give.

Reading Is Power: It's All about the Student

Brenda D. Thonsgaard • Jersey Village High School

9th-12th Grades • Dyslexia Reading • Resource Reading

Teaching is all about the student. Every day in the classroom, a teacher makes an impact on individuals, either positively or negatively. This choice is one that teachers and students alike have the opportunity to make, and it influences how they affect each other's lives. They become reflections of their choices. For a reading teacher, this choice determines whether or not students will become better readers.

Being a reading teacher in a high school is a daily challenge. Emotions run high; no one wants to admit to having a reading "problem." My choice is to make certain that my job reflects positively in the eyes of my students and in the skills they learn in my classroom. Every day I choose to influence my students in a positive way by getting to know them as people. To reach that goal, I must know the heart of the individual and develop a relationship based on mutual understanding and respect. Only this connection will allow me to begin my role in facilitating their journey to reading.

For me, teaching is personally knowing each student's strengths and recognizing that behavior is not as much an indication of poor attitude as it is an indication of a need for empathy and help. My students tell me that the most important thing they get from me is a relationship that sees them

as individuals and not just as names on a class roll—the ability to see past surface behavior into their souls, so they can start on the road to effective reading.

I hold true to the idea that I have to break down the wall between my students and my teaching. One of my students gave me the greatest advice when he said, "Teachers need to help their students out...Go with their pace... Make things easier to understand...Get to know who we are..."

In my classroom, I take it slowly. I get to know my students, and I let them get to know me. I often ask my students how they feel about my reading course, allowing them to help guide me through our journey. An insightful young man once told me, "The hardest thing for me has been going through school with other kids knowing that I can't read or write. Now, after this class, no one looks at me. I feel really proud."

Reading is power! It is a gift I can give to many who have never experienced its pleasures. But I must first take a personal journey with each student into life, and then I can help him in his quest for literacy. This journey may be long, slow, and hard, but it is well worth the effort.

I am assured by the African proverb, "Going slowly doesn't prevent one from arriving."

What I Really Teach

Frank Troyka • Cypress Falls High School

9th-12th Grades • Band

When asked what I do for a living, I offer only that I am a teacher. Invariably I am asked what I teach, and I reply, "I teach kids!" Though this statement may sound glib at first, as a high school band director, I work hard to help my kids

understand the relevance of the study of music to the other important things in their lives.

Some of my students will continue to play their instruments in college as music majors, and some will continue just for fun. Others will move on to

other things entirely with only the lessons learned to carry with them. In any case, I want three things for my students:

- I want them to experience genuine success, so that they become accustomed to seeing a task through to its end. In a highly technological society, there are still no shortcuts when learning to play a musical instrument. It takes hard work over a very long period of time. I believe there is value in hard work.

- I want them to develop a love of music and the humanities in general. Music transcends language and cultural identity, and I believe it to be a key to greater human understanding.
- I want them to go out into the world and do these same things for others. This will be their legacy.

What do I do for a living? I'm a band director, and I teach music. But I teach kids first. Music is the best way I know to teach kids.

A Safe Place to Learn

Leilani Weber • Hairgrove Elementary School
1st-5th Grades • Resource Reading/Language Arts

"Mrs. Weber, where are you going to teach next year?" asked Brady*, one of my fifth graders. "Why do you ask?" I replied, curious to discover where this inquiry was going. "We've all decided that you should come to junior high with us."

Aside from being flattered, I was struck by the innocence and sincerity of these words, which caused me to pause and reflect on my six years as a resource teacher and, in particular, my three years with this group of students. What is it about my classroom that allows my students to be with me year after year and never grow weary?

I arrived at the conclusion that every year that my students walk into my classroom, they know that they will be greeted with kindness, encouragement, and a sense of safety. While this formula seems obvious and all-too-simple, it is my belief that these are the very qualities that have given my students the courage and the motivation to grow and succeed.

Many of my students experience some level of fear and humiliation on a daily basis. Being asked to read aloud in social studies or write an essay in science can often be a traumatic

experience for them. They know all too well where their weaknesses lie—in their reading and writing. Unfortunately, these are the two areas necessary in virtually every aspect of school. So they choose to hide behind jokes and a "Who cares?" attitude.

A sense of safety and encouragement, therefore, becomes of utmost importance when they walk through my classroom door. It becomes my responsibility to chip away at that exterior and get to what lies beneath—a child who is eager and desperate to learn. The only way that this process can become possible is if I cultivate an environment in which they feel secure enough to take risks and make a few mistakes.

I would like to think that I have created this environment for Brady and his classmates. I notice more hands in the air, and I hear more pleas to be the first one to read. And I hope, as Brady enters junior high next year with a bit more confidence in his abilities, he will know that I will, in a sense, be there with him.

* *Not the student's real name.*

Positive Role Model

A CFISD teacher is a *positive role model* who displays the values and norms defined by good citizenship as well as the personal qualities frequently associated with effective, productive lives—trustworthy, responsible, persistent, optimistic, and respectful of self and others.

What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger

Jane Balsam • Metcalf Elementary School

Reading Enrichment • Dyslexia

The year was 1987, and my husband's job transferred us to Virginia. We were to be there for only two years, but it somehow turned into 10! Of course, I knew that I would teach there—I just hadn't reckoned that it would be for Mrs. Yoder.

Mrs. Yoder hired me to teach fifth grade at Watkins Elementary in Newport News, Virginia. She was a former nun, very imposing, and a lovely, gray-haired lady. I was scared to death of her. We were such opposites—she was very conservative in dress, and I was flamboyant. She was a “by the book” principal, and I liked to “tweak” the rules. She was a Pittsburgh Steelers fan, and I was a die-hard Houston Oilers fan. She was a reserved Pennsylvanian, and I was an obnoxious Texan.

Mrs. Yoder believed in integrating all of the subjects to immerse the students thoroughly in all areas of a theme. One example is our study of the Revolutionary War, which had us

- solving “war” story-problems in math,
 - reading novels set during the Revolution,
 - learning to spell words related to the war,
 - playing games in p.e. that colonial kids would have played, and
 - cooking foods appropriate to that time period.
- I have NEVER worked so hard in my ENTIRE life—or learned so much. She forced me to become a better teacher, always encouraging me to become a lifetime learner. She succeeded, and I am.

Thanks, Mrs. Yoder, for seeing and encouraging potential I didn't know I had!

Not Just One for Me

Kerri Boothe • Arnold Middle School

6th-8th • Choir Director

In my quest to determine who my role model is, I turned to an old favorite, “Mr. Webster,” for a definition of that phrase. According to Webster's, a role model is “a person whose behavior in a particular role is imitated by others.” I then set out on my voyage to name my role model.

Along this journey, I discovered there wasn't just one—there were, and are, many. A life is formed through numerous experiences, and in many of mine I have found models that I aspire to be like:

- the mother who shows unshakable faith and unlimited patience,
- the father who taught me that through adversity comes strength,
- the teacher who instilled a desire to set a goal and then work hard to achieve it,
- the administrator who taught me that it's okay to “say what you mean and mean what you say,”
- the friend who listens and can be trusted,
- the co-workers who show me new ways to teach every day, and
- the students who have passed through my room over the years. Watching them grow, learn, struggle, achieve, laugh, cry, try—and

then try again—makes me realize that if they can do it, so can I.

I choose to identify the positive traits of the many important people in my life and to exhibit those qualities as I travel my daily path. To those people, I am eternally grateful.

I hope that my students will do the same—find the positive role models in their lives and follow their examples to find success. It is an honor to have the chance to be one of those people.

A Candle Loses Nothing by Lighting Another Candle

Betty Brownell • Windfern High School

11th-12th Grades • Family and Consumer Sciences

There is a candle in every soul,
Some brightly burning, some dark and cold;
There is a Spirit who brings a fire,
Ignites a candle, and makes His home;
Carry your candle, run to the darkness
Seek out the hopeless, confused, and torn;
Hold out your candle for all to see it,
Take your candle, and go light your world.
—from *“Go Light Your World”*
lyrics by Chris Rice

As I reflect over my 30 years of experience in the field of education—Head Start, first grade, second grade, fifth grade, special education, high school Family & Consumer Sciences, and teen parenting—it has become apparent to me that I have always striven, among other things, to “hold out my candle” for all my students to see.

All of us bring to our professional lives experiences that have shaped us and molded us and taught us. As a wife, mother, and, now, single parent, I know the value of hard work and persistence. I know the importance of being trustworthy and confident and caring. I know the necessity of being self-reliant, and I know the need for establishing goals so that I can control my life rather than having my life control me.

As I work with young people, I endeavor to teach them the lessons I have learned through my education and life experiences that will, in some way, make their lives easier. I strongly believe in serving as a mentor, an example, a person who exemplifies the essence of an adult who doesn’t just “talk the talk” but actually “walks the walk.”

I have loved working with all of my students, but my heart especially belongs to the “hopeless, confused, and torn.”

- I push for them to achieve far beyond what they, themselves, ever imagined.
- I insist that they learn to love and respect themselves, first, so that they can love and respect others.
- I rejoice with them when they learn to be independent and to serve as their own advocates.
- I demand that they learn to do for themselves rather than to depend on others.

My students have always seemed to trust me by sharing parts of their lives with me and by coming to me when they are troubled. I have always attempted to respond to them as individuals, accepting who they are, where they are at this stage of life, and always—always—encouraging them and loving them. I continuously reinforce to them that “a bad day today ends when a new day tomorrow begins.”

The rewards have been far greater than I have ever imagined:

- students choosing you as the topic of their English assignment, “My Hero”;
- students writing you letters long after their high school days have ended;
- students visiting you with their children; and, the most important reward of all,
- students saying to you, “If it weren’t for you, I would have never graduated. You made the difference.”

As I acknowledge the passing of time and the approaching closure of a wonderful career, I express my legacy for my students simply: “A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.”

One Shining Example

Debra Compton • Cy-Fair High School
Chemistry I-K • Chemistry II-AP

Each day as I enter the classroom, I remind myself that being a good teacher requires not only imparting facts and figures to kids, but also genuinely letting them know that I care about them. My father-in-law, Duane Compton, became for me one shining example of a caring, compassionate teacher. I hope to emulate his style and to be known as that kind of teacher.

Duane began his career with Shell Oil Company in Oklahoma. After a couple of years, he realized this career was not the one for him—he needed to be in the classroom. At that time, the Wichita school district had no p.e. program, but it wanted to start one.

He applied for the job and began a lifelong career he loved. First, he was a p.e. coach, then he was a district coordinator for elementary p.e., and finally he was an elementary school principal. Duane loved kids and had a passion for seeing them develop to their full potential.

In July of 2001, he was diagnosed with ALS (known as “Lou Gehrig's Disease”). The disease progressed quickly, and, in less than a year, this man, who had been so full of life, could barely move. On Valentine's Day of 2002, Duane was called home to the Lord.

Duane never made a lot of money, and he was never famous, but, on the day of his funeral, the church was packed. For one hour during the service, people shared how Duane had made an impact on their lives. Several former students gave testimonies about how Duane never gave up on them. One man in particular (who is now a dentist) stood and talked about how Duane had been such a positive role model for him in second grade. After the funeral my mother-in-law received cards and letters for weeks from students that Duane had taught and touched.

In January of this year, a young man in an Air Force uniform entered my fourth-period class and asked for permission to speak. “Students,” he said, “I would like your attention. You need to know that your teacher not only cares about how well you do in class, but also she cares about you personally and spiritually.” Mike was a student I had taught five years ago, and he just wanted to let me know that I had made a difference in his life.

These experiences remind me that what happens in my classroom today may influence a life tomorrow.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Tammye V. Crosskno • Willbern Elementary School
1st Grade

Early in my teaching career my mentor teacher, Alice Felgner, shared with me the secret of her success. She told me always to remember that teaching children was like planting a flower garden. Each new year we are blessed with a packet of seeds.

- First, we must plan and schedule—staff development, faculty meetings, lesson plans, and team planning.
- We need to check our tools—books, manipulatives and resources.
- With special care, we make sure the soil is just right, with plenty of room for growing—

bulletin boards, room arrangements, and seating charts.

Then we plant the seeds and prepare for the first day of school. Each day we water and feed them with knowledge and adventure.

- We shower them with sun—praise, encouragement, and love.
- Before our eyes, the seedlings begin to sprout.
- As the plants grow, we watch them closely—small-group instruction, cooperative learning, and workstations.
 - We constantly check them for weeds—guided practice, parent conferences, and assessments.

A good gardener keeps in mind that each flower is different and has special needs. Some require extra care—a special someone to watch over them. All through the year we tend our garden. When the year is over, our job is done. But, if we are lucky, the love and care we provided over the past year will foster in them a

self-confidence and a love for learning that will help them reach for the sun.

And then next year, a new garden will begin. I feel truly blessed standing beside the faculty and staff that make up Willbern's flower garden. I pray every day that God will grant me a green thumb.

I Love this Job!

Reneé Fiorella • Walker Elementary School

2nd Grade

For as long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be a teacher. Playing school was just a part of my childhood. So, naturally, I went to college to become a teacher.

As an adult I think of two teachers who really influenced me growing up. My second-grade teacher instilled in me the love of books and the joy of reading. I can remember that every day after lunch she would read us a chapter from a Nancy Drew book. Because of this experience, I fell in love with mysteries, and I eventually (as an adult) collected the entire Nancy Drew series. Today, whenever I introduce a new book in guided reading, I can see the children's faces light up with excitement, and it takes me back to that special time when a special teacher brought about that same excitement in me.

The second memorable experience was with a teacher I had in high school. At the time I didn't

realize why we were so successful in her class, but, looking back, I am now able to understand. She always set high goals and standards for us, and she encouraged us to do our best. Every time she introduced a new concept, she would tell us, "Don't worry, because this (lesson) is so easy, and all of you will be able to do it!" Today I use this same strategy in my classroom. I truly believe that, if you expect a lot from your students, and, if you believe in them, they will believe in themselves, and they will perform up to the high standards you hold them to.

It was just the other day, as I was using math manipulatives to teach a lesson, when a smile came across my face, as it often does. I must have laughed a little out loud because the kids said, "We know, Mrs. Fiorella, you just love teaching math." I thought to myself, "You are exactly right. I love this job!"

Mama, This One's for You!

Robbie Fox • Owens Elementary School

1st Grade

"It's Little Polly!"

That's what I heard time and time again during most of my childhood—from well-meaning souls who noticed the family resemblance my mother and I shared. I just stood there and smirked while my mother proudly beamed. Each time, I resolved that I was not my mother! How dare anyone compare me to her! Who wants to be like her mother, anyway?

That is the way most children feel, I guess. I certainly did. Looking back, I find it amazing how things have gone full-circle, and I have actually followed in my mother's footsteps in many ways.

Like me, she taught first grade for many years. She exemplified for me what a teacher should be.

Some of the things that I learned from my mother and that I try to instill in my students are to appreciate themselves for who they are and to accept the fact that it is okay to make mistakes. We all do, and we can learn from them.

For the past few years in my classroom, we have said a daily affirmation called our "Class Pledge." A student helper leads, and the class repeats. It is simply:

- (1) I am a wonderful person.
- (2) I love myself.
- (3) Today I will do my best.

I always follow this pledge with a statement assuring them that I know they will try to do their best that day. During the years that my classes have recited this pledge, I have sensed increased levels of self-acceptance among the students and the positive feelings they have toward others. These attitudes make the classroom environment conducive to learning.

I never realized what an impact my mother was going to have on my life. By being such a positive role model for me, she has enabled me to take some of her teachings and bring them into the lives of others. Thanks, Mama, for being there. This award is for YOU!

Watching Our Every Move

Tom Harrington • Dean Middle School

6th-8th Grades • Band Director

When my wife and I were about to have our first child, we decided it was time to join a Sunday School class for young parents. There we met a great group of people who were struggling with the same parenting issues that concerned Shelley and me—how to raise our children to be good students and responsible citizens. With all of the outside influences that face kids today, this job seemed completely overwhelming.

One of our first discussions with our new class focused on this question: “What was something our parents said that helped mold us into responsible, caring people?” I really worked on this assignment. I always thought that I had great parents, but I could not remember any great single statement besides, “Eat your salad—it’s good for what ails you.”

Although my parents are very intelligent people who had many wonderful things to say, that quality is not what stuck with me. I realized that my parents were great because of their honesty and their actions. The non-verbal messages my parents gave were worth a

thousand words. Through their actions, I learned life lessons such as,

- Always say “please” and “thank you,”
- Never drive too fast, and come to a complete stop at all stop signs,
- Pay your taxes and bills on time,
- Attend church, and
- Never be late to anything.

My wife and I started to think about what we say and do every day and about the messages those actions send to our kids—How do we talk about others? What does a radar detector say about your respect for law?—and so on.

As a young teacher and parent, I came to realize that kids watch everything we do. They make judgments about themselves and determine right from wrong based on what they see us do, not just what we teach.

As a band director, I am very concerned with how my students perform; however, part of being in my band program is about who a student is and who he is becoming. Be honest and respect your kids because they are watching your every move.

High Fives All Around

Shanie LaCoke • Ault Elementary School

5th Grade • Math

We have all been to a workshop or a college course in which we were asked to list the names of former teachers who had influenced our careers. The same name always appeared on my list. Mrs. Moore was my eighth-grade history teacher. She made topics come to life as we created companies and competed for the highest profits. But, more than that, she took the time to

know and care for each one of her students. She truly exemplified a positive role model in my life.

As I began this school year, I decided to use that college assignment. I asked my fifth graders to write down the names of their favorite teachers and the things they loved about those teachers. The characteristics identified by the children became the basis for our team contract.

We promised to work as a team to establish a positive atmosphere, to build respect, and always to lend a helping hand. I knew that for this to be successful, I would have to lead by example. I have tried to continuously model respecting each other's uniqueness and life experiences. I ask the children about their baseball games and about how the dance competition went over the weekend. I always try to show each child just how much I care.

We searched for ways to celebrate our successes, and we created the "high-five wall."

When a student reaches a goal—in either an academic or extracurricular setting—we paint the hand of the child and make a print to put on the high-five wall. As the year progressed, the students began setting goals, nominating each other for high-fives, and celebrating each other's successes.

Now, when I watch the children doing peer-tutoring or lending a helping hand when a teammate's books fall all over the floor, I hope Mrs. Moore would be proud of the seed she planted in me.

My Positive Role Model—Dad

Mary McCracken • Francone Elementary School

Kindergarten • ESL

In my life, my dad was a positive role model for me as a teacher. He was a basketball coach and classroom teacher who displayed strong values about how to treat others, based on the belief that each one has a positive place in the world.

First, he was always assigned the "remedial" English classes because of his patience, persistence, and optimism towards these students. He had many students who returned to him years later to thank him for having seen their potential. I found myself teaching many of the "at-risk" students early in my career and feeling that same persistence and patience for these students.

Next, he had a respect for all kinds of people—no matter what their race, religion, or situation. He treated everyone with the same fairness and respect. In my years of teaching ESL, I have found this model to be very valuable to me when faced with children from many countries of the world. When others ask what nationalities are contained within my class, I really have to think hard—they are all children to me.

Lastly, the values he displayed in everyday life spilled over into his teaching career. I have tried very hard to display those same values, including a work ethic that compels me to give my all to a career that I truly love and to the children, who are our future.

The Power of Mentoring

Charmion Mohning • Frazier Elementary School

4th Grade • Structured English Immersion

If it is possible for a human to be blessed enough to have two mothers, then I am truly rich. Many years ago my third-grade teacher, Joan LaMoyné Martins, decided that she would adopt me as her protégé. Although I did not know that I had been chosen, she was still able to spark in me a desire to improve the lives of others through education.

About once a month she would call me up to school on a Saturday afternoon to help her decorate her classroom or grade a set of papers. As we whiled away the afternoon, she would ask me questions about what was going on in my

busy teenage life, and she would share her delight at what her students were doing. Her joy in her young charges' lives is what I remember most about my mentor. Through these afternoon sessions, I unconsciously absorbed a great deal of handy teaching advice.

As I entered college, I was as clueless as anybody about what I wanted to be when I grew up. Eventually, I chose teaching as a profession. When I graduated, Joan finally let the cat out of the bag. She wrote me a letter about how I had been hand-picked as her replacement in the

teaching world. She knew even when I was in third grade that someday I would be a teacher.

I hope that my work as a mentor teacher has inspired my students and colleagues as deeply as Joan's guidance has influenced me!

When I Grow Up

Carol Mumma • Fiest Elementary School

3rd Grade • Math and Science

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" asked the teacher. The eight-year-old girl responded, "A teacher—just like you, Mrs. Ausberger."

I look back at my Catholic school upbringing in the small East Texas town of Orange, and I fondly recall my second grade teacher, Mrs. Ausberger. She was my first lay teacher, and I immediately was drawn to her kindness and sensitivity to all of the students. I sensed a connection with Mrs. Ausberger that I still feel today. I deeply believe that it was her warmth and obvious love of children that drew me to the teaching profession, and it is her values that I still try to emulate each day when the bell rings.

Just like Mrs. Ausberger did 32 years before, I greet my students with a warm smile each morning when they enter the classroom, and I say something positive to start their day. One of my professional goals has always been to promote self-esteem and the power of positive thinking in each child. Changing the "I can't" attitude to the "I can" attitude is the greatest measure of success to me as a teacher.

With role-playing and guidance, I model strong character traits during our Friday class meeting and through our "Compliment and Concern" can—a receptacle for strips of paper on which, each week, students have anonymously written

positive comments about each other (to encourage appropriate behavior) and concerns (to discourage inappropriate behavior). The children look forward so much to class meeting day, and, as I read each compliment, they take great pride in being recognized.

Just as I had made pictures for Mrs. Ausberger to hang from the side of her desk, my sweet third grade girls and boys will draw pictures and write notes for me to display in my classroom. Perhaps one girl named Miranda said it best. Upon hearing that I had been selected "Spotlight Teacher" for our school, she stated in a congratulatory note,

"Congratulations on your Spotlight Teacher award, but I think you are more than that. My parents are proud of me for my hard work, and when they say, 'Good job!', it makes me think of you."

While each note is special, my biggest inspiration comes from the students who tell me that they want to be a teacher just like me when they grow up.

While Mrs. Ausberger may have been the one who initially influenced me to become a teacher, it is the sentiments expressed in these notes and letters that encourage me to continue teaching after 16 years.

Teach by Example

Charlotte Peil • Cypress Springs High School

Family and Consumer Sciences • Parenting Education for Teenage Parents

My greatest successes have been with those students often labeled "unsuccessful" by others. The most positive role model in my life, my mother, taught by example the qualities of patience, kindness, understanding, encouragement, caring for others, and giving to those in need. Throughout my life I saw that making others feel good brought joy and comfort

to her life. Now I experience those same feelings as I have an opportunity to work daily with many challenged students.

At the beginning of each semester, I strive to get to know each of my students as individuals, especially the quiet, seemingly uninterested student who selects the back row. My mother's words echo, "People don't care how much you

know until they know how much you care.” So with each semester, with each student, I try hard to focus on that child’s feelings, talents, and unique abilities.

I believe in giving students opportunities to experience success, to interact with a variety of people, to create their own “masterpieces,” and to enjoy the class work, each other, and themselves. Students need opportunities to expand their horizons and to experience success, free from criticism, hostility, anger, shame, and ridicule—experiences they have too often had in other areas of their lives.

Whether in Family and Consumer Sciences or Parenting Education, we practice kindness toward each other and emphasize honoring everyone’s contributions. My hope is that my caring for them spills over into the rest of their lives, and that they, too, then care about themselves and others.

The subject matter contained in both my courses—Family and Consumer Sciences and

Parenting Education—provides opportunities for my students to discuss real-world issues that face them every day. The more life-management skills a student learns, the better quality of life that student will have in the future.

Preparing students for life outside the classroom, helping them set realistic goals, and working with them on problem-solving techniques will, I hope, improve their future decision-making abilities. When students return years later, I am gratified to see that many have become responsible, mature young men and women who credit some of their success to the lessons we have shared.

Students need positive, solid, caring role models. Each day I try to practice the qualities my mother demonstrated. I strive for my students to feel comfortable in coming to me, and, in turn, I try to be responsive to their problems. My place has always been—and always will be—working with teenagers.

Little Things Make a Big Difference

Mandy Peoples • Lieder Elementary School
5th Grade • Language Arts and Social Studies

One year I taught a fifth-grade student who came to me with very low self-esteem, due mainly to her obesity. Academically she had no problems, but socially she was inept. One day some children made negative comments about the new clothes that she had worn to school.

As soon as I realized what was going on, I addressed the whole class and discussed how hurtful our words can be. I set up a mailbox system for the children, and I encouraged them to write letters to the people they thought needed to be lifted up. On the first day, this young lady received more letters than anyone in the class.

That same week, she and I began to meet every Wednesday at our school track, where we would walk for about an hour as we talked. There

was an immediate transformation in her attitude toward school, herself, and the other children. One afternoon I found a note on my desk from her, and it said: “Thank you for making me feel better. Now I feel like I’m wanted. You are such an inspiration to me.”

I still have this letter posted in my bedroom at home. Little does she know, but on those days when I come home and question why I teach because I’ve had a rough day, her words remind me why I teach. If I could talk to her today, I would say to her the same thing she said to me: “Thank you for making me feel better. Now I feel like I’m wanted. You are such an inspiration to me.”

A Lasting Impression

Diana Plamondon • Farney Elementary School
1st Grade

I love it when lifelong friends tell me the stories about their growing up and going to the same school their whole lives. They laugh when they

get together and reminisce about their carefree elementary days. I don’t share these memories with them, but I enjoy them all the same. I, on the

other hand, went to 10 different schools throughout my K-12 career as a student. I am sure I was the attendance clerk's worst nightmare.

I actually remained at the same elementary school for a three-year span that included third, fourth, and fifth grades. In that school I remember exactly when the desire to be a teacher hit me for the first time. I was in fourth grade. Mrs. McLauren made me feel as though I were a very important person—and so smart. She expected us to do our best and helped us see the world through different eyes. She talked

about futures and tomorrows. She made a lasting impression.

Each year, as I start a new school term, I fondly think of Mrs. McLauren. I hope that I will inspire the students in my class to see themselves as I see them. They are wonderful, delightful spirits with their whole lives waiting for them, if they would just dare to dream beautiful dreams for themselves. Who knows, they might even get the honor of being Spotlight teacher—a beautiful rainbow I never in my dreams expected to receive. Thank you!

Papa's Legacy

Stanna Nash Schreiber • Bleyl Middle School
7th - 8th Grades • Communication Applications

"You're still saying it wrong! What's your problem? Do it again, and get it right this time!"

I heard these words shouted to a high school senior who was about to burst into tears. My heart ached for my fellow cast-member. It was disappointing to think that this was, perhaps, what I would have to get used to if I pursued a career in performing arts.

Then I met "Papa" Welton. He was my speech and drama professor, whose teaching and directing became the foundation of what I wanted to be as a teacher. He created an atmosphere of safety, encouraged risk-taking, and, above all, established unconditional acceptance.

His patience was amazing. I thought, "How can he put up with so-and-so? That guy gets on everybody's nerves!" Of course, as I look back

now, I know I was someone who tried his patience, too.

It didn't take long for Papa to know the personal stories of his students. It also didn't take long for us to learn that respect for others was expected in his classes and productions.

When I began teaching, I wanted to use everything I had learned from Papa. He made it look so easy. When I accepted the challenge of middle school, however, I had doubts that I could do it.

Fortunately, I found the "Welton Legacy" flourishing here in Cypress-Fairbanks. Surrounding me are teachers who live and breathe a philosophy of unconditional acceptance. Their knowledge and performance have taught me so much and have remained a daily inspiration to me.

Looking for the Things You Are Doing Right

Michelle Torp • Sampson Elementary School
5th Grade • Math

When I think of someone who influenced my teaching career and my style of teaching, I think of my first principal, Candee Wilson. With her poise, professionalism, and unfailing positive attitude, she was a role model to all of us. She had high standards and goals for her staff, and she expected our absolute best.

As a new teacher in a brand new school, I remember sitting in my first faculty meeting, awed

by Mrs. Wilson as she stood before us and gave us all the information about the different policies and procedures of the school. When the subject of observations came up, she said, "When I come into your classroom to observe you, I am looking for the things you are doing right."

That year in fourth grade, most of our team members were first-year teachers. True to her word, Mrs. Wilson encouraged us, supported us,

and provided a positive atmosphere in which we could learn and grow to become better teachers. I went on to work with her for three more years, until she went on to open yet another new school.

I've always remembered the lessons I learned from Mrs. Wilson, and I try to apply the same philosophies in my classroom. I believe that a warm and positive environment fosters learning and allows students to feel comfortable enough to try new things and ask questions. And I believe that, when you have high expectations, children will rise to meet them. I also think a sense of humor is essential when teaching fifth graders!

In math, we play games and do a lot of hands-on activities to make the lessons fun and interesting. We say cheers and chants together to motivate and encourage each other. The students have many positive-behavior incentives such as tickets, prize drawings, treasure-box rewards, homework certificates, Class Jobs, Happy Grams, Super Groups, Power Points, Super Students, and Super Strategists.

Because math is a subject that requires a student to build upon knowledge and skills learned in previous objectives, the student's "Math Helping Hand Folder" is an important tool for helping him learn and remember concepts. Students' Math Helping Hand Folders are resources they can use during their fifth-grade year and on into middle school.

I think one of the greatest rewards for me as a teacher comes when I receive letters or visits from former students, and they tell me how much they enjoyed fifth-grade math and how much they feel well-prepared for middle school.

I consider myself very privileged that, in addition to Mrs. Wilson, I have had the opportunity to work with so many wonderful principals, assistant principals, and teachers.

With each new school year and with each new group of students, I will remember what Mrs. Wilson told us and will always try to "look for the things they are doing right."

Smiling Down on Us

Mary Pat Thomas • 1942-2002

Cypress Creek High School Math Teacher

[The "Cy-Fair Family" lost one of its own last fall, when CCHS math teacher Mary Pat Thomas was involved in a fatal automobile collision. The following tribute was submitted on her behalf by Principal Jim Wells and other colleagues.]

At least once in a lifetime, we all meet that one person, an individual who so affects our lives that they stay in our hearts and minds forever. Mary Pat Thomas was that one person for many parents, students, and staff members at Cypress Creek High School. She will forever live in our memories.

Mary Pat taught algebra and pre-calculus at Cypress Creek from 1992 until the fall of 2002. She served as algebra team leader as well. The entire Cypress Creek community was saddened by the tragic loss of this outstanding teacher and remarkable human being.

Mary Pat had a majestic quality that would allow her to connect with students and colleagues alike in a most humble, unassuming way. She loved teaching and carried out her responsibilities with an uncommon passion, never giving up on her students and serving as a wonderful role

model for her peers. We will all miss our fellow worker, teacher, and friend.

One of her colleagues wrote of her, "Mary Pat was truly an inspiration to all of us who knew her. I have never met another teacher who worked as hard as she did, while still staying positive. Even though she had a million things to do, she would always take the time to help you out if you needed it.

I really don't know where she found the energy to do all that she did, but I want to strive to be more like her. Teachers, administrators, custodians, and students all knew that she truly cared for everyone in her life.

Cypress Creek High School will never be quite the same, but I know that Mary Pat is smiling down on us..."

Numerous other colleagues and students paid tribute to Mary Pat Thomas in a document that was presented to her family.

Lifelong Learner

A CFISD teacher is a *lifelong learner* who exemplifies the spirit of continuous improvement through selection of and attitude toward activities which foster personal and professional development.

Experience Is the Best Teacher

Carolyn D'Anna • Gleason Elementary School

Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD)

My teaching career began in 1975, but my learning career is an ongoing project. I began teaching pre-K in a private preschool. At the same time I attended evening classes in pursuit of my undergraduate degree.

I always tried to give my students the best education I could offer. But there were some students through the years who needed more, and I didn't know how to help them—a situation that motivated me to seek my special education certification.

I received wonderful training from the University of St. Thomas, where Dr. Ruth Strudler was my professor and mentor. She offered me the opportunity to begin my special education

teaching career at the School for Young Children at the University of St. Thomas.

For the last 11 years I have taught in the Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD). My learning continues. I have learned to be consistent, patient, flexible, and inventive. I seek out resources that will help me to provide the best learning environment for each student.

Attending workshops and meeting with peer teachers help me to gather new and different ideas to try in my classroom. I watch, listen, and question the service providers who come in to work with my students.

I can truly say that every day continues to be a learning experience for me.

High Expectations

Ronald Esch • Adaptive Behavior Center

Middle School Level • Science

High School Level • Science, Social Studies, Math, and English

Having high expectations is the way I motivate myself to grow in my profession each year, and it is the key to my becoming the best teacher and person that I can be. I set high standards not only for myself, but also for my students. My enthusiasm and level of energy are assets of my teaching and motivational for my students. I love my profession and enjoy watching students mature into young adults.

This year I have grown greatly in my expectations for myself and my students, and I have seen great accomplishments. This growth was cultivated by my participation in many professional development opportunities, where I learned creative ways to teach my students.

High expectations became part of my life when I was in high school. Ron Sellers was my government teacher, and he told us what he expected of everyone. His expectations contributed to my becoming a more accomplished learner and adult. When I thought he was hard on me, he would say, "Did you do the best job you could?" This inquiry would always stop me and cause me to question my own work and attitude.

Like him, I know that I want the best for all my students and that the only way to receive the best is to expect the best.

A Lifetime of Opportunity

Vickie Frnka • Langham Creek High School
Early Childhood Professions I & II

My first recollection of school was one of crying as I stood by the sand table. After that, education became a door to opportunity that would help me to develop both personally and professionally.

With no money, but much determination, I made plans to attend Sam Houston State University. I applied for financial aid, and, fortunately, I was awarded a Jesse Jones Scholarship, which provided the support I needed to obtain my Bachelor of Science degree. As soon as I had completed one semester of teaching, I returned to Sam Houston to work on a master's degree. Summers and weekends found me studying in class or doing research in the library. While my husband worked on a Ph.D. at Texas A&M University, I drove to Huntsville at night to complete my degree.

My goal was to finish my degree before we had our first child. Our son was born two months after I defended my master's thesis. When my husband was teaching at Elmira College in New York, I continued to take courses, which I felt would benefit my students.

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District hired me in 1986, and I was amazed by all the wonderful opportunities for professional growth that our district provides. I went from being terrified by computers to feeling comfortable with most of the computer tasks I now handle.

Though my teaching assignment has changed many times, I have always been able to find support by taking classes and workshops through Cypress-Fairbanks, Region IV, conferences for Family and Consumer Sciences teachers, the Houston-area Association for the Education of Young Children, and other professional support groups.

Recently, a technique that I studied in a Saturday workshop helped me to assist a child with his adjustment to preschool. It is a pleasure to teach in a school district that provides so many opportunities for its teachers—opportunities that allow us to be successful in the classroom with our students.

Unexpected Lessons

Julie Holt • Jowell Elementary School
Kindergarten-5th Grade • Resource

As I entered my first semester of the graduate program that would lead to my teacher certification, I received a letter from the benefactor of one of my fellowships. I had written to express my gratitude and to tell him of my plans. His response was some well-intended advice.

He felt that my good fortune should be spent on training that would enable me to work exclusively with children who had been labeled as "gifted and talented." He reasoned that our best efforts should be spent on those who would one day run our country. That day I had some decisions to make about my priorities. I still felt strongly that special education would give me an opportunity to teach children with a wide variety of

talents and needs, so I chose to stick with my original course of study. I have never regretted that decision.

Every day I have the opportunity to work with my team to help children with academic areas that are difficult for them. Some of these children function in the mentally-retarded range, and some of these children have IQs in the superior range. Some are great athletes, and others are wonderful at math. Some have very natural leadership skills. Some have an amazing way of knowing just when someone needs a little kindness. They all have special gifts and talents to discover. I get to learn something new from them every day. I look forward to being a part of the future that they will help create for us all.

Lifelong Dream

Gina Reuter • Sheridan Elementary School
3rd Grade • Reading/Language Arts and Social Studies
Language Arts Liaison

At the age of nine, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher like my father. Through the years, I have attended numerous college courses and professional development classes in order to reach my goal; however, I feel that some of the most valuable lessons I have learned have been from observing and working with master teachers.

In the few short years I have worked with my colleague, Sara Slamp, I have gained so much inspiration from her creativity and insight. Through our collaboration, I have learned how to add fun and excitement to each lesson I teach. When I use these strategies, discipline problems are practically nonexistent.

I have also been lucky to have taught with two very talented problem solvers, Patty Clifton and

Marlene Martinez. When we notice a student is experiencing difficulty, we brainstorm and come up with a plan of action to meet that particular student's needs. My colleagues' influence has helped me to create a classroom environment in which all of the students feel encouraged and successful.

Just like it "takes a village to raise a child," it takes more than one teacher's expertise to educate a student successfully. I am grateful for the encouragement from my parents and the combined wisdom of these teachers and many more. Through their support and inspiration, I believe I have almost obtained my lifelong dream.

One Approach to Teaching

Mary Wells • Post Elementary School
1st Grade

My lifelong goal has been to teach, and, for the past 20 years, I have been blessed to teach students in first grade at Post Elementary. Throughout these two decades, I have learned about and implemented many new teaching approaches in a continuous effort to meet each of my students' educational needs.

Two years ago my principal asked me to become part of the team exploring our school's participation in the Literacy Collaborative. At the time, I did not know much about the project, but I was interested in learning more about teaching my children through the balanced literacy model.

Once we decided to become a Literacy Collaborative school, I was asked to have our school's Literacy Coordinator work in my class. I was honored to share my classroom and students with our new Literacy Coordinator, and we worked together to implement the balanced literacy model in our room. As our students'

reading and writing skills progressed, I realized this teaching approach was one that would help all children be successful.

This year, as part of our school's first Literacy Collaborative teacher class, I have learned even more about balanced literacy, and each day I teach my students using these components. I feel my students are successful because I am working with them in small reading groups and conferencing with them individually during writer's workshop. I have learned to record and analyze my students' strengths and needs, and then tailor my instruction accordingly.

As a lifelong learner, and after 20 years of teaching experience, I feel my willingness to improve my teaching approach has been valuable to my students and me. I look forward to continuing my learning in an effort to educate all my students.

What I Have Learned by Teaching

Gregory Zureich • Cypress Ridge High School

Chemistry • Science Department Chair

At the beginning of my career, I was excited about the opportunity to share my knowledge of science with others. I would like to say that I became a teacher because I have always wanted to work with children, but I did not. I became a science teacher because I have always loved science. I knew my subject, and I thought that, if I presented the information clearly, students would learn. Simply, I thought that is what good teachers did. I had no idea of what I had yet to learn in the classroom.

Over the last seven years, my experiences have led me to revise and expand my concept of teaching. One of the first lessons I learned was that I appreciate and enjoy my interactions with students more than I had ever imagined. I have

found that sharing my passion for science makes me even more excited about the subject, and I have come to understand that students learn the most from someone who has both enthusiasm for the subject and genuine concern for them. I have seen first-hand that more can be learned with laughter and love than can ever be drilled and memorized, and I have found myself in moments when I knew that my subject matter was not the most important thing to be taught.

I have learned these lessons from mentors, colleagues, and students. I now know that teaching is an ever-evolving skill. It is an art that I practice without the goal of mastery, which would set a limit, but with the expectation that I will learn for as long as I teach.

Team Player

A CFISD teacher is a *team player* who cooperates with others for the group's benefit, striving to solve problems by using all pertinent data, listening to and valuing others' viewpoints, and actively seeking consensus.

Surrounded by Others Who Make Me Shine

Jodie Dautat • Watkins Middle School

6th-8th Grades • Special Education

This year has had more than its share of challenges and demands. Teachers, administrators, and support staff have had to expend more time and energy than ever before to meet the growing demands that our profession requires. This year has also been one in which I have had the opportunity to be part of an exceptional team of professionals, many of whom I have the privilege to refer to as friends.

I am fortunate enough to work with a team whose members spend countless hours working together and supporting each other to ensure the success of our students. This year has been one during which I, as department chair, have had to depend more and more on those around me for support and assistance. I have been able to rely on a number of teachers and other staff members who are always ready and willing to assist when the need arises, often without my asking. They are individuals who have spent time and energy away from family and friends, after hours and on weekends, to assist with necessary tasks that are often tedious and time-consuming. At other

times, assistance has come in the form of a look or a joke that would ease the tension on a difficult day.

I have also had the opportunity to co-teach with teachers who serve as role models both in and out of the classroom. In addition, I have the advantage of working for a principal and other administrators who allow me to have a role in decisions made concerning the special education department. My principal has an open-door policy, and—no matter how small the problem—I know she is always willing to listen.

I feel the success I have had as a teacher and department chair has been due to the support and hard work of the people I can count on day-in and day-out. They have taught me the true meaning of being part of a team, and it is because of them that I have been able to shine. Although I am honored to be receiving this year's "Spotlight Teacher" award, it is a reflection of this wonderful team of people with whom I have the opportunity to work each and every day.

That's My Job

Mariellen Hug • Adam Elementary School

Instructional Specialist • Math and Science

I love my job, but it is an unusual job in many ways. Almost every elementary campus in the district has an Instructional Specialist; however, a school-to-school comparison would reveal that the descriptions and requirements are as varied as the students and staff served by those of us in this position.

I began my year moving furniture—lots of furniture. You can ask Abbett, and, if you have had furniture moved, you know who Abbett is. Anyway, not many people can say that they personally placed and positioned about half of the furniture in their building. You might ask, "Did you really get your degree so that you could move furniture?" Well, no. But, if my teachers have to

take time arranging their rooms, that's less time that they can spend planning for our kids.

Helping my teachers have more time to plan, that's my job.

I spend more time than your average teacher in my car going to get "things." I can make it to the Science Resource Center and the Instructional Support Center in record time, and I am quite familiar with the inventory at Basic Office Supply and our nearby Kroger. You might ask, "If the teachers planned properly, wouldn't they be able to take care of those 'things' themselves?" Well, maybe; however, if a teacher has a flash of inspiration during the night, or if his or her expected supplies have not arrived or have not been found, then I can and will make it happen. Who knows—that one lesson might be the key that unlocks the door to learning for one child.

Removing barriers in the way of student success, that's my job.

I can always be counted on to be a teacher substitute, to lead a lesson, or to take a group. You might ask, "Isn't that why your school has

classroom teachers?" Well, yes. But when you think about it...

- If your partner-teacher were at home with a sick child, and his or her substitute hadn't arrived yet, wouldn't you rather have me step in and teach the class—rather than having to take all 50 kids yourself until someone comes to save you?
- If you think that PowerPoint is a really strong index finger, wouldn't it be better to have a "lab lover" like me step in and show your class how to put together a great presentation?
- If you have 22 kids working on four or five different levels, don't you think it would be nice to have another teacher to work with a small group or two?

Sharing the task of teaching our kids, that's my job.

So, if you were to ask, "What exactly do you do?" I would say, "My job is to make *your* job easier. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Dedicated Professionals

Ella Roskey • Bang Elementary School

3rd Grade • Math and Science

Needless to say, I am honored and surprised to have been chosen Bang's "Spotlight Teacher" this year. We have so many deserving educators in our building, so this award is for them, also. The opportunity to work with such a caring faculty and to teach such great students has been a joy to me. My third-grade team members have the terrific ability to share their ideas, strategies, and love with children, parents, and colleagues. Not only are they dedicated professionals, but also they are fun to work with each and every day. No one could ask for a more supportive team.

Quite often I receive visits and letters from former students, and so many times they ask, "Do you remember me?" or "Do you remember when

we did such-and-such in class?" When I attend workshops and encounter former students who are now Cy-Fair teachers, it is such a gratifying experience when they, too, remember activities they did in my class years ago.

My parents always stressed to their children the importance of getting a college education, so it was no surprise when I, as a fourth grader, announced my intentions to be a teacher. I absolutely could not wait until college graduation to fulfill my dream, and I have enjoyed every moment of my 26 years of teaching.

It is such an honor to receive this recognition. Thank you, Bang staff. This award is one I cherish.

Teamwork Equals Success at Wilson Elementary

Lisa Schiro • Wilson Elementary School

Special Education

When I first came to Wilson Elementary, I knew immediately that I was joining not only a

group of teachers, but also a family. It was clear to me that we were a team, working for the

growth of each and every student with whom we came into contact.

In special education, especially in a co-teach situation, the ability to be a team player is vital. When you work daily in the same class—for as much as two hours at a time—you not only share strategies that you already know work well with students, but also learn new ways to reach and teach students. Because our administration stresses the importance of staff development, sharing information among ourselves, and vertical

alignment, we all are working for the same goals—our students.

All of these influences made it easy for me to take on positions that have enabled me to grow in many ways. I can assess students' individual growth, and I can work together with my co-teachers to ensure overall growth across the curriculum. We as teachers are only as good as the administration and the co-workers we have around us. If one of us shines, it is a testimony to those with whom we work. We are all reaching for the stars here at Wilson!

New Beginnings and Great Expectations

Kathleen Voltz • Aragon Middle School

8th Grade • Language Arts Co-teach • Special Education Department Chair

While serving as the first department chair for special education at Aragon Middle School, I have always tried to put into place the principles described in Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. When Aragon opened last year, it was important for teachers and paraprofessionals who work with our students to "begin with the end in mind."

We needed to function as a cohesive group of caring adults who always put our students and their parents first. I set the tone for this philosophy by making myself available to my team as much as possible throughout the day and after school. As we went about establishing routines and procedures for our new department, I demonstrated that I valued their hard work and

the extra time that they put into their jobs. I asked teachers' opinions and ideas on procedures that they had used at their former schools, acknowledging that there is always more than one way to accomplish a task. When a teacher or paraprofessional had a problem, I worked with the parties involved to find a "win-win" solution.

Lastly, I demonstrated that I would never ask anyone in my department to do anything that I would not do myself. As a result, I think Aragon Middle School has a strong special education department with dedicated teachers and paraprofessionals who care not only about the students in the special education program, but also about every child who walks through Aragon's doors.

Online Version

This publication—along with **Spotlight** editions from some previous years—may be viewed online by visiting the Web site of Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D.

Instructions:

Go to www.cfisd.net.

From the list on the left side of the screen, click on “Departments.”

Click on “Curriculum & Instruction.”

On the “General Information” list, find “Spotlight Teachers.”

Click a year.

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