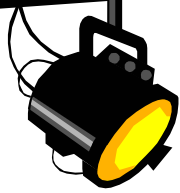




Spotlight

Volume XX

**May, 2005
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD**



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Table of Contents

Introduction

Honoree **Article Page**

Instructional Strategist

Barnes, Rose	“By Nurture and Nature, a Strategist Is Born”	5
Chandler, Jeanne	“Unique Instructional Strategies Can Make the Difference”	5
Ferrell, Terri Elizabeth	“It Was Your Song!”	6
French, Charlotte	“You’re in P.E.?”	6
Keene, Senisa	“Crazy?”	7
Missall, Robyn Weigand	“Please Don’t Cry”	7
Nixon, Dawn McGuffin	“Everything Is Geography”	8
Srivastava, Supriti	“The Power of Books”	8
Vogtman, Betty	“All About the Lesson”	9

Creator of Student-centered Environment

Amato, Mandy	“First-grade Family”	10
Chaney, Camile R.	“Game Time”	10
Chapman, Deborah	“A Kid in a Candy Store”	11
Childers, Heather	“The Christmas that Changed My Life Forever”	11
Ganster, Donna	“Gotcha!”	12
Hummel, Kylee	“Let’s Party!”	12
Hunter, Laryssa	“True Learning”	12
Hurst, Heather	“Caring Is Preparing”	13
Johnston, John S.	“Learning of Fun and Games”	13
Kerlegan, Kimberly	“All Children Are Special”	14
Kessler, Paul	“Walk a Mile in a Child’s Shoes (Even if They Don’t Fit)”	14
Klepper, Cynthia M.	“An Open Heart Leads to an Open Mind”	15
Loveless, Michelle	“Our House (from a First-grader’s Point of View)”	15
Merz, Brittney	“Always Talking...”	16
Pitts, Beth	“Good Choices, Poor Choices”	16
Renfro, Glen	“Listen to the Children”	17
Richter, Terri	“got books?”	17
Santibañez, Marisol Guerra	“What a Student Taught Me”	17
Schatte, Kathy	“Teaching—It’s the Real Thing!”	18
Tremonte, Christine Adair	“Cabbage Town Lessons”	18
Warner, Betsy	“We’ve Got You”	19
Wright, April	“Give ‘em Your Heart”	19

Positive Role Model

Allen, Jamie E.	“Blasts from the Past”	20
Attaway, Nancy	“Together Everyone Achieves More”	20
Benestante, June	“The Power of a Role Model”	21
Brown, Janise Hollie	“Like Mother, Like Daughter”	21
Crozier, Suzanne	“Too Many to Count”	22

Dailey, Maggie	“Grow as You Go”	22
Davis, Angela M.	“The Gift”	23
Evans, Kay	“Role (Model) Reversal”	23
LaMore, Heidi K.	“A Toast”	24
Lemmons, Nina Ortiz	“What’s in a Name?”	24
Marlow, Gina Lynn	“My Inspiration”	24
McKenna, Laura	“The Power of Positive People”	25
Mosher, Suzy	“Thank Goodness Opposites Attract”	25
Provo, Michelle E.	“Four Generations of Positive Role Models”	26
Purnell, Eva J.	“Education...a Worthy Purpose”	26
Ruby, Ami	“Rooting for the Underdogs”	27
Suter, Casey	“Positive Role Models Are Class Acts”	27
Timko, Mona Gayle	“For an Ol’ Gal, I’ve Still Got It!”	28

Lifelong Learner

Bolado, Susan L.	“Teaching Others What I Had Trouble Learning”	29
Davis, Lee	“Old-timer”	29
Fisher, Peggy	“Dreams <u>Do</u> Come True”	30
Scott, Brandi	“Creating Lifelong Learners”	30
VandeRiet, Joni	“Mirror Images of the Past”	31
Vicary, Michelle	“A Grandfather’s Dream”	31
White, Claudia	“You Teach Best What You Need to Learn”	32
Williamson, Susan	“By Teaching, You Will Learn”	32

Team Player

Burns, Lana	“The Joy of Teaching”	33
Davis, Lori	“Working Together = Student Success”	33
McIntyre, Carol	“Teachers Never Work Alone”	34
Price, Amy	“Working Together to Make a Difference”	34
Schewe, Kathy	“I Can Help”	35
West, Jean	“We Can Make a Difference”	35

Index by Campus		36
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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 20th year, the “platinum” anniversary—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 2005 **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.

By Nurture and Nature, a Strategist Is Born

Rose Barnes • Wilson Elementary School
3rd Grade • Language Arts, G/T Language Arts, Social Studies Co-teach

Being a strategist was necessary for survival in our house—to accomplish anything while living with 13 other people, I had to have a plan. To get into a bathroom at the necessary time or to escape from one of the many pranksters waiting to pounce out of the closet, I needed a plan of attack. To be successful, I had to have skills and directions, but, most of all, a strategy! Many of these strategies became useful in my everyday life.

This need for planning became clear in high school. Esther Ruth Goodman was my biology teacher. Her strategy was to make her students see the relevance of why they were there and of what they were doing. She made us care. Biology became important to us because it was important to her. We did not want to disappoint her. For me, biology was important because I

respected her. Her expectations were the same for everyone, but her delivery varied according to each student's needs.

Throughout my 25 years of teaching, I've tried many new and varied strategies. But I've always made efforts to

- show the relevance,
- keep the interest high,
- vary the activities, and
- adjust to meet the different needs.

Some students like me, some think I'm fair, and some call me tough. I show respect, and I usually receive it in return. I like what I have become.

To my parents, Weldon and Laura, my seven brothers and four sisters, and Esther Ruth Goodman, I thank you.

Unique Instructional Strategies Can Make the Difference

Jeanne Chandler • Copeland Elementary School
1st Grade

The more I teach, the more evident it becomes to me that a good instructional strategist must look at every student individually and try to diagnose what would make him or her more successful in a given subject area.

I used this philosophy on a student in my class who was becoming very frustrated with her inability to remember basic things that came so easily to other students (for example, the order of letters in the alphabet, numbers, and the letters in her name).

To relieve some of this frustration so she could concentrate on learning, I came up with a

notebook especially for her to refer to when she needed it. This resource book was hers alone to use. The notebook contained very simple things like an alphabet chart, a number chart, a name plate, and a vowel chart. For example, she knew how to add $3 + 4$ to make 7, but she couldn't remember how to write the numbers correctly. With the resource book, she could simply look up how the numbers should be written.

When she started using her resource book, I noticed an almost immediate improvement in her frustration level and attitude towards learning. Her grades improved dramatically almost

overnight. This book was the key to removing the obstacle that was keeping her from learning. As educators, we must find unique instructional

strategies to help each and every student become a successful lifelong learner and problem solver.

It Was Your Song!

Terri Elizabeth Ferrell • Lieder Elementary School
2nd Grade • Math & Science

My journey began with an observable need to help my students reach their full potential. About five years ago, I shared my vision for creating a program that would empower

- teachers with a pathway to learning through questioning;
- students with the tools of depth and complexity; and
- parents with the components of scholarliness to inspire their own children to greatness.

By combining the findings of educational researchers such as Kaplan, Kagan, Payne, and Michalko, I accumulated the most needed strategies. When combined, these seven tiered components served as a catalyst of observable success, which evolved into “S.M.A.R.T.” (Strengthening Minds and Reaching Tomorrow).

With each passing year, I have seen the parents of our community take a greater interest in their children's education. More importantly, I

have seen my students leave with a strengthened sense of confidence, an air of independence, and a determination to meet the challenges that lie ahead. I choose to be a teacher for them.

At this stage in my journey, I know:

- Every lobster needs a crab. We are all creatures of the sea!
- Passion is my guide, and “their” voices are my beacon.
- If there ever was somebody who made me believe in me, it was you!

*“It was your song that made me sing
And it was your voice that gave me wings
And it was your light that shined
Guiding my heart to find
This place where I belong
It was your song.”*

—Benita Hill & Pam Wolfe
from “It’s Your Song”

You’re in P.E.?

Charlotte French • Sampson Elementary School
Kindergarten through 5th Grade • Physical Education

During my growing-up years, p.e. was not my favorite subject. I was the kid picked last for teams, the kid in right field with my glove over my face, and the kid who looked for any excuse not to participate in p.e. I gravitated to individual sports, like swimming, which I could enjoy without the competitive pressure.

My freshman year in college I knew I wanted to do something with physical activity because I loved to run and exercise in general. I thought about sports medicine, corporate fitness, and *teaching*. I couldn't understand why a person like me, who obviously had no problem with exercise, had such an aversion to p.e. Then it hit me—I wasn't the problem: p.e. was.

There had to be a better way to *teach* p.e. If you watch young children play, you can learn a great deal about the way they learn. Young children play *games*, not *sports*. My classroom looks so different from how it looked 20 years ago. We have nutrition lessons and, more importantly, we play games that teach students physical skills. It is very common to enter my gym and find students stacking cups or pinning food labels to each other.

My goal is to reach children in the gym, athletically gifted or not, and find their favorite activities. People who knew me growing up still ask, “You’re in p.e.?” and I can smile and say, “Yes, and I love it!”

Crazy?

Senisa Keene • Thornton Middle School
7th Grade • Language Arts

“To waken interest and kindle enthusiasm is the sure way to teach easily and successfully.”
—Tyron Edwards

I cannot imagine teaching without engaging the kids to become interested and willing participants in my classroom. Because of this approach, I am prone to outlandish antics in my attempts to spark their interest. During the past year, I have played the following roles.

- a “greaser” wearing a leather jacket with slicked hair and rolled up jeans
- a “construction worker” during our “Extreme Paper Makeover” donning a hard hat and tool belt with plastic tools representing the traits of good writing
- a “research scientist” in a lab coat and safety goggles who aided in the search for coherence in writing

- a “drama queen” dressed in a feather boa and tiara who responded to literature vividly and modeled how to find and write “drama” that interests readers
- a rejected “American Idol” contestant who sang page numbers aloud until all students found the page
- a “languicise” instructor who “worked out” with the students the proper formula for a compound sentence; “5, 6, 7, 8 sentence comma fanboys sentence punctuation”
- a “coach” with TAKS “blitz” formations

I thought I was incognito until I overheard two students in the back of my classroom.

“Ms. Keene is straight-up crazy,” commented a student, shaking his head and watching my exaggerated motions.

“No, she’s just trying to get our attention and make us want to come to class,” answered the other student.

Please Don’t Cry

Robyn Weigand Missall • Post Elementary School
4th Grade • Language Arts & Social Studies
English as a Second Language • Structured English Immersion

My love for writing has developed over my last 14 years of teaching. Nothing is more rewarding to me than observing a group of students become authors. As they begin to write, many of them lack the confidence and self-esteem to put words on paper. I feel that my most important job is to be their support and cheerleader as they begin to take that risk. Through this experience, I found my success story.

“Please don’t cry,” I begged. I had never before experienced a student cry and look at me with total desperation every time we would write. He was the first student I had come across who had such a barrier to writing. I knew I had to dig deep to find that one special thing that would ignite a spark.

Discovering that he was passionate about gymnastics, I began there. Setting aside a special time for us to work, I slowly began to break down the barrier. He realized that he could write about gymnastics for almost any prompt. Tentatively at first, he would write one paragraph, then two. Then, one day, I watched him complete a paper without me. I began to see a distinct change in him. We now have a special connection. I am his teacher, and he is mine, too.

Today, as I watched him proudly turn in another composition, I thought to myself, “My job here is finished.” Then I smiled, because my job is not finished. That is why I teach.

Everything Is Geography

Dawn McGuffin Nixon • Cypress Ridge High School
Human Geography • World Geography • Team Leader

“Geography is everywhere! Geography is connected to everything.” These are the words I live by, but my students feel compelled to disprove them. Many ask how my students feel connected to the classroom. I respond, “They have no choice.” Beginning from day one, I explain to all of my classes—whether World Geography or AP Human Geography—that this course is one of the most relevant ones offered, and it’s one of the easiest to grasp. Students’ success and understanding rely upon their observations of daily life and their application of geography.

Students don’t ride the bus to school; they “travel via developed infrastructure.” Crowding of the main hallway or commons area of the school (where they hang out) is really a “chokepoint affecting student traffic patterns.”

Focusing on my athletes, we discuss how football is played, how a softball field is set up, and how passing occurs in basketball. Of course, everything gets a geographic twist, and students learn that sports are just applications of geographic analyses of space and patterns.

Students are offered an automatic “A” if they can prove that something is not connected to geography. Through heated discussions, animated role plays, and detailed written explanations, they soon come to a realization—instead of proving that the example does not connect to geography, they have, in fact, used the Five Themes of Geography or a TEKS/TAKS concept to prove that it is.

In the end, students are successful in the coursework, but, most importantly, they have learned that geography is everywhere and in everything.

The Power of Books

Supriti Srivastava • Holbrook Elementary School
Special Education • Resource

Eight summers ago, I was a student at the University of Houston. I took a children’s literature course with Dr. Richard Abrahamson. He is both a distinguished figure in his field and an author for various publishers of educational materials. I remember his first class to this very day. He read a picture book called *Leo the Late Bloomer*.

After he finished reading, he advised us to read this book to parents during Open House in the fall. He stated that parents, then, would have more realistic ambitions for their children. They would remember the story if their children were not doing well academically. Like the book’s main character, Leo the tiger, who took all the time in the world to begin reading, their children would also bloom someday soon.

Every day, Dr. Abrahamson read the best of children’s literature to us. I distinctly remember enjoying reading 40 classic works in just three short weeks. He emphasized that children should read books that teach real-life problem-solving.

I believe a major goal of education is to help children become problem-solvers in our complex world. But children should first read books for the sheer pleasure of reading. Once this love for reading is established, students will be receptive to learning reading strategies, easing the teacher’s task.

I read to my students every day. One day a student came to my class shouting with joy. “Mrs. S.,” he said, “What are we reading today?” I was delighted to learn that my students enjoy reading as much as I do.

All About the Lesson

Betty Vogtman • Emmott Elementary School
3rd Grade • Math & Science

During a recent parent conference, I was told, “You’re all about the lesson and getting it done,” a description that caused me to reflect on my teaching strategies. I must admit that this parent was correct. From the first day of class to the last, I am dedicated to my students’ success in learning.

My math classes are serious but fun. Because third graders are involved in problem-solving daily, I require them to use the “SQRQCQ” series of steps. Part of this process involves finding code words that indicate the best solution strategy. My chants and clues help students remember these code words. Competitive games and partner activities ward off problem-solving boredom. I even carry math review materials to lunch duty; students respond to flash cards while waiting in line.

In science, I find it very important for students to see a connection between the topic and their

own lives. My classroom is often cluttered with real-life examples that relate to the unit. Current newspaper articles bring science into the everyday world. Science is discovered all around us, including the lunchroom and playground. An animal from the Science Resource Center is on display so we can observe its characteristics and habits. And, as in math, we use clues to help with difficult vocabulary terms. I was thrilled when a student came up with an excellent way to remember how long the Earth’s rotation takes. He said to pronounce the word “ro-day-tion”!

Students have so much to learn in such a limited time. Every minute counts, and I’ve never been one to waste time. It’s no surprise, then, that I am seen as the teacher who is “all about the lesson and getting it done.”

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.

First-grade Family

Mandy Amato • Jowell Elementary School
1st Grade • Language Arts

With every new school year, I feel I am receiving a brand-new, little “family” full of six- and seven-year-old children. Initially, we’re both nervous and shy, but eventually all of our personalities mesh together, and we become quite comfortable with one another. This adjustment takes place every year without exception. The only unknown during this transition is how close this new family will become.

I thought I had a close relationship with my students this year, but my perception changed in December. Our principal, Mr. Maness, asked if my gracious partner and I would mind moving to a portable building to accommodate new teachers. The students seemed less than eager, but none of us anticipated that this change would bring us even closer together.

As the year has progressed, our “portable family” has blossomed. The portable became our home. We decorated it together and carefully placed all the furniture in just the right places making a cozy little room that we all look forward to coming to and feel comfortable learning in.

Students are so kind and considerate, full of genuine compliments and concerns for each other. My most precious moments are the times I feel a hug from behind, only to see a child I never thought I was reaching. Then I know that our class is close and that the most important things in the room are the little learners.

We met, we moved, and now we will all be better off for having spent this year together creating our very own first-grade family. I look forward to all the new families I will be a part of in the coming first-grade years.

Game Time

Camile R. Chaney • Campbell Middle School
6th-7th-8th Grades • Adaptive Behavior

Adaptive Behavior is a place where many teachers dare not go. It is a place where students may “devour” the young and inexperienced. Yet, somehow, I have survived.

My students, like all students, want to be respected. They want a teacher who is interested in them. If these needs are met, their behavior improves. I have designed my classroom with this idea in mind. Our room has become a sports arena, where the students are the players and I’m the coach. When they hear “Game Time,” they know to gear up, act interested, mind their manners, and focus their eyes on the teacher.

With every success, the students “gain yardage.” If there is a “flag on the play,” the students know to be careful, or a penalty will follow. This system allows the students a chance to self-correct without direct attention.

Taking an interest in my students has allowed me to form a bond with them. The students know they are in a safe environment with people who care, a situation that allows them to be comfortable when questioning and sharing ideas. With the classroom structure in place and everyone’s emotional needs met, we are on our way to the big game of life. Not every day is a “perfect score,” but you can’t lose with winners in the game.

A Kid in a Candy Store

Deborah Chapman • Holmsley Elementary School
2nd Grade • Language Arts / Reading

I will never forget my second grade teacher, Miss Smith. She was a 4-foot-11-inch-tall “rock” full of love *and* discipline. She had very high expectations and knew how to make students achieve them. She taught us to read and spell using phonics.

At age 7, I would sit on her lap as she sold candy at the candy counter during recess. (Since she was disabled, she could not stand for long periods or walk without a cane.) I would spell words like “antidisestablishmentarianism” for the principal, teachers, and parents. She would reward me with candy, but the rewards were much greater than that—I felt “empowered.”

Years later, I found myself teaching! When I moved to Houston, I interviewed with Norma Ault to work for Cy-Fair ISD. I saw many of Miss Smith’s qualities in her. She hired me and gave me a wonderful mentor, Beverly Lane, who was such a loving example with kids.

In 1993, I came to Holmsley as a teacher (for *second grade*, just like Miss Smith!). Barbara Goldstein and Suzanne Thompson have created a warm, child-centered environment at this campus. Andrea Kuhn and the staff are the best! It is not a wonder—why, with my experiences, I feel like a “kid in a candy store.”

The Christmas that Changed My Life Forever

Heather Childers • Ault Elementary School
4th Grade • Mathematics

My life forever changed 14 years ago as I embarked on the journey of a lifetime—“Teaching.”

I remember one special Christmas, when I was a young girl, that I hold dear to my heart—the year I received my very own chalkboard from Santa. From that moment on, I was certain that teaching children would be the fulfillment of my lifelong dream.

As it has been stated, “Children come in all different shapes and sizes,” and so do their learning styles. I feel that incorporating movement into the students’ day is a crucial part of creating a student-centered environment. Some days my students consider my math class to be an extension of p.e. as they demonstrate their problem-solving skills through scavenger hunts, sports/games, or musical chairs.

After “p.e. class” ends, our “music lesson” gets underway. Visit my classroom, and you will

hear us singing, chanting, and even rapping our way to success. Since so much of our world is centered around music, I can’t think of a better way to teach meaningful concepts.

We venture into art as well. Students love to draw, so why not incorporate art into solving problems as well?

My first priority of each day is to make sure all students feel loved, secure, and confident that I believe in them. If my students feel comfortable in their environment, I believe they will take risks and strive to do their very best. I agree with Les Brown, who once said, “Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.”

I reflect back on these last 14 years of my magnificent journey and say, “Santa, thanks again for that chalkboard, which led me to where I am today.”

Gotcha!

**Donna Ganster • Lamkin Elementary School
Kindergarten through 5th Grade • Art**

Art is an equal-opportunity subject, not one reserved just for a select few. The art room is one of the few places where children can succeed no matter what their level of academic skills may be. Whether interpreting, analyzing, describing, critiquing, or producing art, they discover that there can be many different solutions to a problem.

Art involves the whole child and bridges all subject areas. The students aren't even aware of learning skills that will transfer to reinforce their efforts in other classes. What a great way to boost a child's confidence, teach him to think in different ways, encourage him to become a risk taker, and unleash the creative side of his brain!

Each child leaves art class with the feeling that he or she has become an important contributor to society. The only thing I ask of my students is that they do their best. In my class,

they really can't mess up, a condition that helps get rid of the dreaded "I can't!" attitude. Art allows children to become dreamers and gives them wings to soar to new places.

Teaching art is the best job in the world. Every day is different! I never get bored.

Teaching the full span of 5- to 11-year-old students can be quite a challenge. Whether I'm presenting an artist or illustrating the elements and principles of art, my use of varied, creative teaching strategies gets the students' attention and hooks them into learning. A few tricks of the trade are

- be a ham,
- think of silly sayings to convey ideas, and
- sing songs (I'm not a singer).

When I'm presenting ideas or lessons, the students say, "Cool!" or "Wow!"

I say, "Gotcha!"

Let's Party!

**Kylee Hummel • Birkes Elementary School
3rd Grade • Math & Science**

"It looks like a party in there every day!" exclaimed a student as he passed by my third-grade math and science classroom. These words touched my heart because it is my ultimate joy to create a vibrant atmosphere where the love of learning shines well beyond our four walls.

When I was a child, one of my most anticipated moments was going to a birthday party! I eagerly awaited the games, fun, energy, and overall excitement a party brings. It is my goal to present each of my lessons in a way that provides the same level of enthusiasm for my

students. By using themed lessons, decorations, and fun activities, I am able to turn a typically mundane task into an adventure upon which my students enthusiastically await to embark.

My expectations remain high for all levels of students in my diverse class. By providing a positive learning environment and motivating, student-centered lessons, I have found frustration levels easily reduced, a state of mind that enables all students to soar.

It brings great joy to my heart to see the smile of success beaming across a child's face. I truly believe I have the greatest job in the world!

True Learning

**Laryssa Hunter • Aragon Middle School
8th Grade • Integrated Physics & Chemistry • Science Department Chair**

When I first entered Cy-Fair ISD about four years ago, I did not know what to expect. The teachers and the district had such an excellent

reputation that I felt unqualified. My students were so intelligent, motivated, and dedicated to learning that I began the year thinking that I

would be the one learning and that I had nothing to give. I soon found that there was a lot to learn, but that I also had a lot to give.

My primary focus in teaching is to challenge students to take what they are learning to a high level of understanding by encouraging them, giving exciting lessons, and providing a comfortable learning environment.

For example, this year my students and I are putting on a Science Carnival for 5th graders. My students, who are taking Integrated Physics & Chemistry, must relate IPC objectives to 5th-grade science objectives and design an inquiry-based lesson to teach to the fifth graders. This project is funded by a grant and encourages

students to be teachers. The project gives them the opportunity to revisit objectives taught throughout the year and challenges them to bring those objectives to life for students who will soon be a part of the middle school environment. My hope is that this endeavor will validate their learning and make them realize that there are many connections in the world of science.

I strive to make science come alive for students who are sometimes taken for granted because they are intelligent and want to succeed. My job is to make sure that they are working not only for the grade, but also for the glory of knowing that they understand and can apply that learning.

Caring Is Preparing

Heather Hurst • Fiest Elementary School
5th Grade • Math & Science

“And plants make food through a process called photo...what?” Mr. Taylor would inquire with enthusiasm.

“Synthesis!” we chorused back, displaying the same excitement.

One of the most memorable and gratifying educational experiences I have ever had was in Mr. Taylor’s seventh-grade life-science class. Why? It is simple: he loved teaching science, and he valued his students.

Keeping us constantly engaged in learning, he encouraged us to study and know every detail—we were “scientists” in his class, planting, growing, investigating, even dissecting! His passion for science and learning was contagious!

My goal for my little mathematicians and scientists is that through active investigation of the “*how’s*” and “*why’s*,” they will develop my love for learning, always inquiring to learn more.

My students have even gotten into the habit of asking me at the beginning of each science experiment, “Is *this* your favorite experiment?” My answer is always, “Of course!”

Celebrating the small successes is a daily event. Students build confidence—both personal and academic—as they “take a bow” for a great answer in class, earn smiley-face stickers for showing all work in math, or receive acknowledgment for displaying quality character traits. Such feedback experiences are key in students’ developing a love for learning.

I have been truly blessed to work with and learn from caring and talented teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators at Fiest. Caring about kids is the first step in winning their hearts and preparing them for success. Teaching is the most wonderful job, and children are a gift. Watching a child smile as a result of success is a most rewarding experience!

Learning of Fun and Games

John S. Johnston • Francone Elementary School
5th Grade • Math & Social Studies

I guess I was lucky in high school because I had some of the most creative teachers I’ve ever met. Their influence has helped make me the teacher I am today. My high school history teacher, Mr. Reagan, made games of most test

reviews. This approach made a much better student of me and many of my classmates.

Likewise, I always have some type of competition going on in my classroom, and it’s

especially helpful at the end of the year when things can be trying at times.

I have developed a curriculum-based “Jeopardy” tournament. Students divide into groups and work towards winning the tournament—just like the real game show *Jeopardy*. Over the years, the game board has changed from paper-and-pencil, to-wood-and-chalkboard, and then to PowerPoint. Now the game is played on the computer using *Visual Basic* software into which I have programmed questions, scoring, “Daily Doubles,” and inputs for buzzers to ring in.

In the intramural football and softball leagues I have organized, all students are included.

Boys and girls play together, have fun outside of class, and learn to work together toward a common goal.

Each spring, as I have students paint maps on the sidewalks, my aim is to develop students’ pride and confidence. They are responsible for making decisions, such as determining the amount of each paint color needed, to complete the project. I want them to feel the way I do—that it is important to take ownership in their school and give something back.

I hope that through my example, which I learned from my teachers in Croswell, Michigan, the students whose lives I touch will learn more than just math and social studies.

All Children Are Special

Kimberly Kerlegan • Metcalf Elementary School
3rd Grade • Language Arts & Social Studies

My students are like my second set of children. When I speak with others about them, I often refer to them as my children. I treat them as if they are the most important people in the world because all children are very special in their own way.

On the first day of school, I tell the students about myself, my family, and my teaching experiences, and they listen very attentively. Then they have their chance to tell me all about themselves, and I actively listen and make comments that help to begin the process of making the students feel comfortable in my classroom.

For the remainder of the school year, I keep the lines of communication open with them, and we share ideas, interests, concerns, compliments, hugs, and the world of knowledge. My students work very diligently and strive for academic achievement because they know that I care about them and that I believe in them. I always try to make a big deal out of their accomplishments because it makes them feel extra-special and boosts their self-esteem—very important parts of my job.

My students are the center of my attention, and they make me proud to be their teacher. They are a huge part of my heart!

Walk a Mile in a Child’s Shoes (Even if They Don’t Fit)

Paul Kessler • Adam Elementary School
5th Grade • Math & Science

“What do you mean different children have different needs? If I’m going to spend hours on my lesson plans, then every child better get the assignment done!” This response was my attitude my first year of teaching—until I got to know Jeanne Shenkar, the school social worker. She helped me realize that you must understand a child and his or her individual needs to be an effective teacher. Jeanne took me on a home visit, and, boy, did my eyes open up to a whole new world.

The particular student we visited lived in a 12-foot by 12-foot apartment with his mother and four younger siblings. How stupid could I be to expect this child to do his homework when he had hardly even eaten the night before? Since Jesse* had to cook a meager dinner and take care of his brothers and sisters, school was his last priority.

I decided to start an after-school club for at-risk boys. That project turned out to be the best thing I have ever done. The boys looked forward

to Thursday afternoons, and so did I. We would talk about life and our problems. This group's bond was the closest that some of them came to having a real family. Yet I have days when I wonder who benefited more: the kids or me.

I have learned that to be an effective teacher you have to get to know your students for who

they are, in and out of the classroom. Once they see that you care and understand, that's when you can make a difference. Now I make a point to walk in my students' shoes—especially the ripped and torn ones.

**name changed to protect privacy*

An Open Heart Leads to an Open Mind

Cynthia M. Klepper • Millsap Elementary School
3rd-Grade • Bilingual

My first trip on a school bus for a daily route did not happen until I was a teacher. The August heat didn't keep the bus from resonating with the sound of children still excited about the first few days of school. I wanted to know where my first grade students lived. That day was the beginning of many trips I would make to their homes. It's my belief that creating a student-centered environment goes beyond the limits of the classroom.

The following day, the students entered the classroom full of questions. Did I see their siblings? Did I notice the flowers that were in the front yard? My mind was going a mile a minute, as I was thinking about how the students could use the knowledge of their world to facilitate learning.

The students were eager to share and were willing to open up their hearts to me. My job was to challenge them, to encourage them, and to help them grow. The years have come and gone, and new students have entered my classroom, yet each year I challenge myself to find creative ways to connect with my students.

I've attended their ball games, their coming-out parties, and their graduation ceremonies. I receive postcards and I send postcards. We celebrate their accomplishments in the classroom, and sometimes they invite me to celebrate their accomplishments later in life. They know that they are the center of my classroom and that I care deeply for every one of them.

Our House

(from a First-grader's Point of View)

Michelle Loveless • Farney Elementary School
1st Grade • Math & Social Studies

In "our house," we move, sing, play games, and talk about what we have learned and how we can excel with our new knowledge. Our teacher encourages us to talk a lot; whether to share our new ideas or to pull a friend aside to work out a conflict. We even sign up for "share box" daily, just to share a little more of ourselves. We have classroom elections, giving us opportunities to vote, serve on a campaign team, and give speeches.

In "our house" we change our seats every six-weeks just to get to know new people and work with them. Every time we "rearrange the furniture," we each can share our positive expectations for our new table "family."

We go to curious learning spaces with these family members.

- Computer Canyon
- Reading Rock
- Problem-solving Plateau
- Mountain Manipulatives
- Social Sea
- Grassland Games

In these places, we work collaboratively and independently to sharpen our skills and challenge our minds. Another place, the rocket, is where I can go if I need some "peace and quiet" time for me.

Each month we have a family project! Some projects are designed to provide quality time with

our families at home while completing a product to share at school. Other projects we vote on and give to those who are in need.

Our class pet and motto is COW, which stands for cooperate, on-task, whisper. (Thank

you, CFISD Elementary Math Dept.). We leave each day knowing that we are loved and accepted!

Our teacher loves her job!

Always Talking...

**Brittney Merz • Sheridan Elementary School
1st Grade • Math, Science, & Social Studies**

I am a talker. I have always been described as a talker and am at the center of many jokes and one-liners because of my talking. But I think being a talker is one of my best qualities as a teacher. I love to talk to my students, and they love to talk to me.

From the first phone call to the parents, to the day the students leave my room for second grade, we talk. At “Meet the Teacher” night, I am always guilty of having parents and kids still in my room after the event has ended, something that occurs because I am “talking”—building relationships with my students and their parents.

As the year rolls on, I know my students’ hobbies and they know mine. It is not uncommon for the first few minutes on Monday mornings to include a discussion of the most recent football scores and an analysis of reasons

for the Dallas Cowboys’ (my personal favorite) losing again. Such sharing is one way I build long-lasting relationships and a student-centered environment.

I have found over the years that the personal relationship you have with a student parallels the learning and teaching relationship you have with that child. Parents also love to see that you are involved with more than just academics.

I know what brings light to my students’ eyes when they have had a rough morning. Each day I make sure I discuss a little about some hobby with the students so they know I am here for them more than just to teach.

I vow as a teacher to always “talk” to the students and parents. It helps build relationships and an environment where the students are comfortable and ready to learn.

Good Choices, Poor Choices

**Beth Pitts • Bang Elementary School
2nd Grade • English as a Second Language**

David Hieb, a teacher from Duluth, Minnesota, outlined his behavior-management strategy to my college class. His strategy encouraged students to develop self-control by making good choices. He theorized that a student who made a good choice gained control of the situation. Hieb further stated that the student, upon making a poor choice, yielded control to the teacher. He emphasized the need to help students become intrinsically motivated to make good choices.

Halfway through my first year of teaching, after trying a variety of behavior-management strategies with little success, I pulled out my notes from Hieb’s strategy and began using it with my students. This strategy has become my foundation for classroom management.

I begin each school year by brainstorming and charting “A” Choices (good) and “B” Choices (poor) with the class. We look at the natural consequences for both types of choices and discuss what it means to have self-control.

Students keep *Choices* tally sheets on their desk to keep track of their own behavior. It is exciting to see the joy expressed in their eyes when they are able to add a tally mark for making an “A” Choice. When a student makes a poor choice, I can simply ask, “What kind of choice did you make?” encouraging him to take responsibility for himself and his actions.

My goal is to see students make good choices, not because of my rules, but because of their desires. This intrinsic motivation sets the stage for student success.

Listen to the Children

Glen Renfro • Lowery Elementary School
Kindergarten through 5th Grade • Music

Kids have their own unique way of communicating with a teacher. Learning each child's way is one of the keys to successful teaching. It's amazing how different each student's thinking process works, and the only ways for the teacher to learn is by listening and by observing the child's behavior.

In a large-group situation, with about 818 children on my roll, gaining this familiarity becomes a real challenge. What a great opportunity to teach and influence "young America"!

Creating a student-centered environment is extremely important in this situation, and I truly

love what the students teach me as I listen to them and observe them work. This interaction becomes a constant way of life in our classroom and makes for a great learning environment.

Someone once said, "The best investment to give children is your time." How you spend that time is the key to the child's success. The time I spend best occurs when I'm listening and understanding each student so that he or she feels valued and important.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to be in this teaching situation!

got books?

Terri Richter • Hairgrove Elementary School
1st-2nd Grades • Reading Enrichment

Some people need coffee to jump-start their day. However, the simple thought of hearing my students ask, "Who *gets* to read with you today, Mrs. Richter?" is what inspires me. I love that they *want* to read to me.

Quickly, they snatch up their three familiar books to reread as I take a running record. As I try to gather my books, I'm delighted to see that they are still reading and haven't noticed it's time to stop. It's difficult to take the books away when they haven't finished reading; however, it's reassuring to hear them say, "I'll start here tomorrow and read this one first."

I think my students are eager to come and read with me because my classroom is a fun and safe place to learn. I start on their individual levels, make it easy for them to understand, and try to create a comfortable environment in which they can take risks and feel successful.

My underlying motivation is to observe what each child can do today and think about where he or she needs to be tomorrow. I give praise and encourage reading strategies I would like to see students continue using. I challenge my students to problem-solve and make decisions on their own.

It's a joy to see their faces light up when they finish their new books. It's thrilling to see them become independent readers. I see their motivation boosted as well as their reading level.

My hope is to develop a love for reading in my students and build their self-confidence. These goals, I believe, are accomplished through creating a safe and comfortable environment for learning. It's rewarding to hear them ask, "What's our new book for the day?"

What a Student Taught Me

Marisol Guerra Santibañez • Dean Middle School
7th Grade • English as a Second Language • ESL Team Leader

I will never forget my first year of teaching. I especially remember one student named Pedro*. In reading class one day, I asked for student

volunteers to read, and he raised his hand. I assumed he wanted to go to the restroom or just leave my class, and I was shocked when he

asked if he could read. I had him read aloud, and he read beautifully. From then on, he always wanted to read. I would constantly tell him that he read perfectly. He loved the attention, and he loved reading aloud.

Whenever he came into my classroom, I would sit by him to engage in a personal conversation, asking him how things were going and what he did over the weekend. He loved all of the questioning. On occasion, I would have him help other students with reading when they

worked in groups or needed individual help. I made him feel smart and important.

I sometimes wonder whatever happened to Pedro. I heard from him till he got to eighth grade, but I don't know how things ended up for him. I know that he really made a difference in my life and my teaching career. He taught me that with a little love and care any student can be and feel successful.

**name changed to protect privacy*

Teaching—It's the Real Thing!

Kathy Schatte • Bleyl Middle School

6th Grade Reading Teacher • 6th-7th-8th Grade Dyslexia Specialist

For the past 29 years I have been a teacher. During these years, I have tried my best not only to teach students, but also to let them know I care about them as individuals.

This year, after returning from winter break, I wanted to spend a few minutes in each class asking how students had spent their time off, but I also wanted the students to tell me their reaction to the tsunami. After all, this disaster had been breaking news on every television channel for the past week.

I opened each class by reading a newspaper article about a dog that had saved a family. Since we were getting ready to read the story, "The Dog of Pompeii," these discussions could help set the stage.

It worked! Many students had seen the news and eagerly wanted to tell me a story they, too,

had heard. When I dismissed seventh period for lunch, I noticed one of my students staying behind. I remembered in the class discussion that she had been perfectly quiet. When we were alone in the room, she told me in an apologetic manner that she didn't know what we were talking about in class.

I sat down with her and briefly explained what had happened and how it had happened. She listened intently as I talked about the earthquake that had occurred off the northwest coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. She was intrigued with everything I told her. As she walked out of the classroom a few minutes later, she turned around and gave me a quick hug. I treasure those moments.

Cabbage Town Lessons

Christine Adair Tremonte • Cypress Creek High School

11th-12th Grades • Aquatic Science

My mother taught in a poor area of Atlanta that was called "Cabbage Town" due to the cooking smells from the affordable food of choice. She taught me that you don't *tell* the students how to make the homemade ice cream or how it tastes, you take the ingredients and the ice cream freezer to school and let the students make and *taste* it—a special experience for those special students. This attitude is the same approach I use when teaching Aquatic

Science—or any other science course that I have found myself teaching in Cy-Fair ISD.

Through field trips, I have been allowed to guide students to select tools and instruments to measure, collect, and record scientific data about the chemical and physical factors of the environment around them. They experience the teamwork involved in performing the tasks of measuring the slope of a beach, the speed and direction of a water current, and the size and frequency of waves.

It never fails to excite me to see the thrilled reaction of the students when they see the fish, crabs, shrimp, or stingrays they have caught in their collecting nets. They have learned to accept a challenge, solve a problem, and acquire a survival skill they might one day need. Some

of my students have lived in Houston their entire lives and have never been to the beach. I consider myself fortunate to be able to provide and share in these special learning experiences the students will always remember.

We've Got You

**Betsy Warner • Yeager Elementary School
4th Grade • Language Arts • Structured English Immersion**

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to participate in our fourth grade's annual field trip to ROPES—a district-sponsored event which challenges students to take risks and encourages teamwork. As the bus pulled up to Moore Elementary, I sensed the excitement of the children and felt my own anticipation. The previous year I made a promise to myself: if given the chance, I would “tackle” the Big Swing, one of the high elements.

Once situated, I watched as students began to shift into their assigned groups. As I listened and observed, I couldn't help noticing their confusion and frustration as they struggled to solve the problems presented by the instructors. Then the mood shifted from commotion to cooperation, and I witnessed some of the most touching scenes of my teaching career.

As Ricky* struggled to maneuver his stocky little body through the air, he was being helped and encouraged by the entire team. Amazed by the intelligence and empathy these students demonstrated while problem solving, I marveled at how capable they were of directing their own learning. Clearly, my job would be to provide a safe and accepting environment, giving them the necessary tools and support to realize their potential.

Before long, I was being harnessed for my “big ride.” With only a flimsy cable attached to my waist, I was hoisted 40 feet into the air by my students. When I looked down, all I saw were smiling faces. As I prepared to “fly” through the air, I heard from below, “Don't be scared, Mrs. Warner. We've got you.”

**name changed to protect privacy*

Give 'em Your Heart

**April Wright • Hancock Elementary School
1st through 5th Grades • Special Education / Resource**

Sitting in Mrs. Norman's second-grade class admiring her desk full of books, paper clips, markers, papers, and Elmer's paste, I knew that I would one day become a teacher. But how?

After finishing school, I knew how. I had the perfect plan—my philosophy. I would make teaching fun, use energy to help students find their own motivation, teach to each child's specific needs, and encourage students to be lifelong learners.

But then new obstacles arose.

- How do I convince a fifth-grade boy who struggles with first-grade reading to read aloud?
- How do I encourage students who hate school to want to come to school and learn?

- How do I help an eight-year-old first-grader who thinks she has no friends, and who just moved away from her mom and dad, understand that if she just tries, she can do it?

I can't just tell my students that I believe in them—I have to show them. So I do. I respect them. I talk to them honestly. I keep my promises. I joke with them. I give them me—my stories, my hard times, my good times.

We build a trust and a confidence that is shown through the child's desire to learn, to take risks, and to try his or her best. They want to come to school. I give them my heart, and, in turn, they give me theirs.

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.

Blasts from the Past

Jamie E. Allen • Carlton Pre-vocational Center
LIFE Skills

It was an ordinary day of school. I arrived early and was ready for another fun day with my kindergartners. By lunch I was a bit tired as I went to check my mailbox, which contained a call-slip. The name on that slip took me back 14 years—to my first year of teaching—and it evoked a warm feeling as I easily pictured a very active and inquisitive red-headed little girl.

As it turned out, the call I returned later that day was from the *father* of that young lady I had taught “oh, so long ago.” Her dad had tracked me down after all these years to invite me to her college graduation. The family decided that it would be a treat to invite her kindergarten

teacher, whom she talked so frequently about at family gatherings and whose model she had decided to follow in becoming a teacher.

The next few days were full of searching for pictures and anticipating a face-to-face meeting with my grown-up student. Amazingly, she looked much the same as she had. Still retaining her exuberance for life, she was as thrilled to see me as I was to see her. The next week was such a delight, catching up on all that had happened over the years. The greatest joy is knowing that the efforts and mistakes I made were fondly and positively remembered, even after all these years.

Together Everyone Achieves More

Nancy Attaway • Langham Creek High School
10th-11th-12th Grades • Aquatic Science

Teaching is a continual learning process. I have become skilled at acquiring as many ideas as I can, and as much help as possible, from master teachers. As Andrew Carnegie once said, "Teamwork...is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." I would not be where I am today if it were not for amazing teachers who were generous with their time and talent.

There are two individuals who stand out in my mind as having made a world of difference in my life. Although I have always had a passion for the ocean, I must admit that I was apprehensive about teaching Aquatic Science. I knew that having an interest in a topic and being able to teach a curriculum about it are not necessarily the same thing.

Thankfully, I had Becky Mitchell come to my rescue. She had been teaching Aquatic Science

and had no problem walking me through the curriculum. Becky always emphasized the power of hands-on science—getting students actively involved. Becky would meet with me constantly to be sure I understood the objectives as she showed me how to incorporate laboratory activities into the lessons.

The second teacher who helped me was Christine Tremonte at Cypress Creek. Christine is creative and organized. She always takes the time to share her ideas. From carefully thought-out field trips to the projects she created, Christine has enriched my classes. With her help, I am able to enhance my students' understanding of the curriculum.

I am fortunate to be working in a district with such professional, generous, and talented teachers.

The Power of a Role Model

June Benestante • Truitt Middle School
6th-7th-8th Grades • Physical Education

The motto “practice what you preach” has guided me in my personal and professional life. This cornerstone of my teaching philosophy, of utmost importance in physical education, was instilled in me through various sources.

- My parents taught me the values of integrity, honesty, hard work, and community service.
- While I was a student, numerous skilled teachers modeled passion for their subjects.
- The enthusiasm of Becky Ryder, an excellent teacher and coach, and an avid, accomplished runner, gave the impetus to my life as a runner.

Through running, I adopted the “whole body” mind-set, incorporating all areas of fitness into my daily life. I learned to set goals and work diligently to achieve them, developing discipline and perseverance while learning what the human body can achieve and endure. As racing instilled sportsmanship and camaraderie, intimate long runs with friends improved listening and communication skills.

These values transferred naturally into the classroom, helping me guide and inspire students to attain productive, physically-fit lives. Exposing students to a variety of activities increases their chances of finding passion for a sport.

My running with the cross-country team builds rapport with the students and, I hope, motivates them to continue running, whether for competition or for the simple love of running. Recently, a returning team member reported to the first practice having lost 20 pounds, and his mom proudly told me that running cross-country promoted his weight loss and decreased his asthma suffering!

Although considered “old” by many students, I continue striving to be their role model. I want them to experience the fun and rewards that physical activities have to offer and to know that people do not play because they grow old; people grow old because they stop playing!

Like Mother, Like Daughter

Janise Hollie Brown • Frazier Elementary School
2nd Grade • Math & Science

I owe a special thanks to my mother, Mary Hollie, for being my first teacher. I remember her waking my siblings and me each summer morning to start our schoolwork. She fixed breakfast, and then the assignments began.

She would hold my hand to form my letters correctly and sit beside me to help me read. After that, the math drill would start. After missing three facts, I would have to write the whole set over. She told me to learn all I could because she was only going to be able to help me to the seventh grade.

Because my mother had been obligated to give up pursuing her educational goals so that she could help her family, she was determined that all of her children would have the

opportunity to complete the education that she'd had to sacrifice. When she could not help us, she used every possible resource (my sister, even the insurance agent). My mother encouraged me to go to college and pursue a career that would allow me to be independent. Continuing to encourage education, she would say, "If I teach it to you, don't keep it to yourself—help your family members and friends along the way."

With these words to live by and her hard work and perseverance motivating my desire to succeed, I've been able to achieve successes in my life—such as teaching others that same philosophy—that, I know, would please her.

Too Many to Count

Suzanne Crozier • Moore Elementary School
Kindergarten

I have always wanted to be a teacher. I was the child who went to school all day and came home to play “school” with my friends. I know that I am a successful teacher because of all the “teachers” I have had as role models throughout my life. I have become the teacher that I am today because of these significant people.

- My parents, who instilled in me a love of children, acceptance of differences, and patience;
- The administrators, who taught me to be a lifelong learner and always gave me the support that I needed;
- My teaching partners and team, who help make teaching fun and always share such creative ideas;
- The paraprofessionals, who have provided continuous support for both me and my students;

- My students, who constantly amaze me with their enthusiasm for learning (What a privilege it is to be their first public school teacher!);
- My own two children, who have grown into wonderful adults while inspiring me to be the kind of teacher who fosters each student’s personal *and* academic growth; and
- My supportive husband, who understands the hours that I spend preparing for my students.

These people have helped me to realize that every child needs to feel accepted and successful. All children deserve to be treated with respect. They need to know that their teacher cares for them and wants them to be successful, even when they have challenging behaviors or learning difficulties.

Grow as You Go

Maggie Dailey • Windfern High School
LIFE Skills

My first teaching job was an assignment in a small town as the resource teacher (special education) at the elementary school. The former teacher left detailed lesson plans for the first six-weeks’ term, but there were no instructions for all of those unexpected adventures that happen daily in a classroom. I needed help!

The following fall, I started my first job in Cy-Fair. What a wonderful change! Even before a mentoring program for teachers new to Cy-Fair was established, Pat Beard took me under her wing and helped me during my first years at Arnold Middle School. Pat’s love of teaching was contagious, and that feeling was a confirmation to me that I’d made the right career choice.

My next assignment was with the L.I.F.E. Skills program at Langham Creek. Working at a

high school was a new experience for me, and, fortunately, I was assigned two incredible assistants. Pat Marshall and Susan Oliver shared my adventure, and their expertise concerning students with disabilities was invaluable.

In 2000, Judy Satterwhite became my colleague at Windfern High School. Although Judy came to us with 30 years of experience, I was assigned as her mentor! I taught her the “Cy-Fair way,” but she taught me that consistency and well-defined boundaries, as well as treating students with dignity and respect, are the keys to success as a teacher.

After 19 years in education, I have learned that we continue to grow as we go. We learn from our colleagues, our students, and their families on this journey called life.

The Gift

Angela M. Davis • Owens Elementary School
5th Grade • Math & Science

His name was Juan*. He came to my bilingual class in late October of my first year of teaching. Although he didn't speak a word of English, his big, brown eyes told his story for him. He had just arrived to live with relatives he had met only once. Juan's parents had been murdered in Mexico City about three weeks prior. I knew we had some serious work to do.

The first words he said to me were, "*Maestra, tengo miedo.*" ("Teacher, I'm afraid."). So I whispered back to him, "*Yo también.*" ("Me, too.") We formed a bond that school year. Every free second I had, I worked with Juan.

The year flew by, and we finally reached the last day of school. We were packing up when a small hand patted me on the back. I turned to see Juan proudly presenting a gift to me. In

perfect English he said, "Miss, I want you to have this." The present was a raggedy teddy bear with a torn red ribbon around its neck, one of the few possessions that he had managed to bring with him to Texas. I began to cry softly. "Juan, I can't take this from you. It is one of the few memories that you will have as you get older. You should keep it."

He replied, "No, Miss. I don't need it any more. I will have the memory of you. *Ahora, no tengo miedo.* (Now, I am not afraid.)"

I will never forget Juan's gift. Through life's great adversities, we must remember not to be afraid of what the future might hold. We must have the courage to embark upon the adventures that have sought us out.

** name changed to protect privacy*

Role (Model) Reversal

Kay Evans • Jersey Village High School
Geometry • Precalculus

She was a painfully withdrawn sophomore in Algebra I. Her hair always covered her face, and, when I gently asked what was wrong, she would neither look at me nor answer me.

Somehow I convinced her to stay after school and talk, although she mostly just stared downward as tears rolled off her cheeks and onto the desk. I sat by her side when we made the call to CPS.

During the next years, when her family shattered, and she endured counselor after counselor, I kept telling her that it would all be worth it. Laura* believed in me; I was her role model, and I tried hard to be a good one.

Years later, she decided to attend college. No matter that her parents hadn't provided any funds—Laura worked hard putting herself through school. She was a dedicated, intelligent girl. By the time she was 26, she was already

earning more money than I did, but she continued with college because that was her goal. After seven long years, her graduation invitation finally arrived in my mailbox. When she walked across the stage to receive her degree in psychology, it was I who had tears rolling down my cheeks.

After graduation, Laura left her lucrative job to follow her heart. She now teaches special education, successfully reaching students with her outgoing personality, boundless creativity, and caring nature. The sad and withdrawn girl of 1988 is now a mature, vivacious woman. The transformation has been amazing.

Laura showed me that one teacher could truly make a difference. She has been my role model ever since I met her, and I gratefully share this award with her.

**name changed to protect privacy*

A Toast

Heidi K. LaMore • Cypress Springs High School
11th Grade • U.S. History • Social Studies Department Chair

There seems to be a common thread shared among most people—they can name at least one teacher who, at some point, served as a positive role model. For me, that teacher was Mrs. Champagne (Yes, that really is her name!). She was my fifth-grade teacher and the best one I ever had.

I knew for a fact that I was her favorite student; however, I soon found out that every student in her class believed himself or herself to be the favorite student. She had a unique way of making every student feel special.

She taught us to respect others and to accept differences among our peers. Mrs. Champagne was always kind, warm, and gentle with

everyone. We always wanted to do our absolute best in the classroom because we had such respect and love for her.

Mrs. Champagne is the type of teacher I strive to be. I encourage those same values and qualities in my students. I want them to learn not only the required objectives, but also those other important life lessons. After they graduate, I know they probably won't remember the Populist Party and the silver issue of the 1890s, but I think they will remember the importance of being kind to others, having respect, and being responsible.

These are the things I remember from fifth grade. So here's a toast to Mrs. Champagne!

What's in a Name?

Nina Ortiz Lemmons • Labay Middle School
6th-7th-8th Grades • Reading

During what seems like a lifetime ago, but what was actually just a few years ago, my campus underwent a change in demographics. As is true with many people, I feared change. What could I expect from the new students who would grace our hallways? One thing I didn't expect was to learn so much from them.

As I looked into the sea of different faces, I realized that these children, many of whom came from poverty and were second-language learners, had a look in their eyes that seemed somehow familiar. My mother must have had a similar look when she was a child—the hunger for an opportunity to learn.

My mother was a high school dropout, yet she managed to go back to school. Not only did she

graduate from college, but also she went on to earn a master's degree and a doctoral degree. Like some of my new students, she, too, was a second-language learner who came from poverty.

Although she wasn't my teacher in school, my mother was my teacher in life. She taught me to see the good in people and to strive to make sure each student was successful. I have learned so much from my mom, and I continue to learn something new from my students each day. I see her as a child when I look into their faces, and I want the best for each of them.

So what's in a name? Everything. I am my mother's namesake.

My Inspiration

Gina Lynn Marlow • Walker Elementary School
2nd Grade • Math, Science, & Social Studies • English as a Second Language

I was a senior in high school when I realized that I had a special interest in helping all children learn and believe in themselves. My elective course was to observe and interact with the

kindergarten class at Crockett Elementary in Baytown.

Candis Bond, the kindergarten teacher, and Jo Beaty, her assistant, inspired my special interest in and love for all children. I watched

them care for each student on an individual basis and strive to provide each student with the skills needed to learn and to feel good about themselves. The skills they taught used the students' strengths to improve their weaknesses.

The summer after my high school graduation, I had an opportunity to observe the children in the TYKE program (“Teach Your Kids Early”) in Katy ISD. The TYKE program, serving ages birth to three years, addresses children who have special needs. I observed the instructional program, met the parents, and attended some of the parent-support meetings. I wanted to be a

part of this special world, and I looked forward to the days I spent with the TYKE program.

My experiences influenced my desire to seek a career that encompasses both regular education and special education. Having this “dual” background, I am able to create an environment for *all* children to learn. I find it very rewarding to observe students learning to respect individual differences in learning abilities and a diversity in cultural backgrounds. I find inspiration in seeing increased confidence levels and enthusiasm in the children as they enjoy learning.

The Power of Positive People

Laura McKenna • Reed Elementary School
1st Grade • Language Arts, Math, and Social Studies

Being a positive role model is so important when teaching or working with children. Positive teachers can have great power in influencing the future of their students.

It would not be fair for me to focus on only one teacher who has inspired me to become a positive role model for my students. I have been blessed to have three elementary teachers—plus my grandmother, who was a teacher—possess the qualities of a positive role model.

Mrs. Chatmon, my first-grade teacher, always with a loving smile, encouraged students to respect one another and stressed the importance of good citizenship. I remember how, as the class would recite the “Pledge of Allegiance” each day, she would stand so proudly and say the words with us. I thank Mrs. Chatmon for helping me learn about the importance of being a good citizen.

Both Mrs. Redding, my third-grade teacher, and Mrs. Elliot, my fifth-grade teacher, fostered

qualities of persistence and optimism, characteristics that a positive role model possesses. These two outstanding teachers continually expected the best from each student they taught. Continually encouraging and pushing in positive ways, they always got the best from me because I knew they believed in me. I hope to develop the same qualities in my students.

Lastly, my grandmother had an important part in my becoming the teacher I am today. She was a hard worker, and she respected others. I was only 10 when she passed away, but I knew she was admired and respected by her students and fellow teachers. I remembered the letters written and words spoken about my grandmother, describing how she was a role model. I know I have made her proud by following in her footsteps.

Thank Goodness Opposites Attract

Suzy Mosher • Keith Elementary School
1st Grade • Language Arts • English as a Second Language

As I reflect on my years of teaching and all of the positive role models who have helped to shape me as a teacher, one name continues to come to mind—Melissa Mueller. We taught first grade together my first year of teaching.

We were an unlikely pair to start out. She was everything that I was not. She was outgoing, confident, and organized. I was quiet, unsure, and...unorganized. Despite those differences, something drew us together. We

spent many hours in partnership, planning and sharing.

With each week that passed during that first year, I knew she had something special that I admired. She had the gift of knowing what made each of her students “tick.” She could listen to their needs, even when they weren’t speaking. Her students could feel her love and acceptance in everything that she did.

Melissa was always searching for innovative ways to teach her students. Every child in her

class mattered! Each one felt as if he were the most important one in the class. I am so thankful that opposites attract and that I was fortunate to teach with and learn from Melissa Mueller.

To this day, as I am getting to know each of my students and trying to discover what makes each one “tick,” I think about the impact she had on me. And, just like Melissa, I want all the children in my class to feel that they matter... because they do!

Four Generations of Positive Role Models

Michelle E. Provo • Cypress Falls High School
10th Grade • World History

Over a period of 100 years, my family gave me the tools to be a positive role model because three prior generations were teachers.

- My great-grandmother graduated from Snow Hill Institute in Snow Hill, Alabama, in 1903, a time when few graduated from high school—and certainly not people of color.
- My grandmother graduated from the University of Kansas.
- My mother graduated from Fisk University.

When I was a young child, we lived in the school attendance area where my mother taught. I remember walking through the mall, where we were constantly running into students. I would get terribly frustrated because she would stop to talk to student after student.

Then I became an eighth grader, and my mother was the counselor at my school. I began to see how seriously she took her job. The school day began at 8:15 a.m. and ended at 3:15 p.m. I had to wait for her, and we sometimes didn’t leave until 5:00 p.m. or later. She didn’t seem to have regular office hours. We even took a student into our home, and she physically took her to college in Iowa!

I saw my mother both at school and at home, and I knew she was truly a great role model. Many of her teachings echo in my head daily. I try to pass them on to my students. People often hear me remark, “My mother always says...” because I learned first-hand from her what it means to be a positive role model.

Education...a Worthy Purpose

Eva J. Purnell • Hamilton Middle School
8th Grade • U.S. History

“I find life an exciting business, and most exciting when it is lived for others.”

“...true happiness...is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.”
—Helen Keller

At some point in childhood, I stopped asking my favorite question: “Why?” Teachers would always prompt my thinking by replying, “Why not?” My parents and grandparents frequently took me to museums, cathedrals, battlegrounds, memorials, plantations, and swamps. Yes, swamps—to answer more of my “Why?” questions.

My parents and grandparents exposed me to environments that promoted my sense of self. I learned invaluable lessons from my grandfather, who completed eighth grade, yet ultimately became an entrepreneur. It was his sense of purpose that made him successful. The idea that skills are gifts was modeled to me daily, and I learned that we must use our gifts daily to promote worthy purposes.

As a child, I would “educate” my brothers by sharing my vast storehouse of knowledge. My high school teachers prepared me for life by instilling a love for reading and an understanding

of the cultural diversity of my hometown, New Orleans. I learned to appreciate the city's history and unique blend of people. My own family spoke a mixture of languages, and the stories told at family gatherings caused me to realize eventually that I, too, had a diverse background. From these experiences my love for history grew, and teaching it still excites me today.

I gain true happiness by using my God-given gifts to make a difference in students' lives, answering their "Why?" questions, and directing them to "Why not?" My former students' accomplishments and loyalty to purpose make me proud that I have found a worthy purpose in life—education.

Rooting for the Underdogs

Ami Ruby • Alternative Learning Center
9th, 11th, and 12th Grades • English

I tend to root for the underdog—whether the participants are in a football game, an ice skating tournament, or my classroom. I love the thrill of seeing people compete against all odds. I guess that's why I have always loved teaching at-risk kids.

I am amazed by the courage it takes for some students to achieve in school. For many students who have overcome great adversity, just attending school presents its own challenge. I have taught students who were homeless, pregnant, neglected, illiterate, bullied, abused... and the list goes on and on.

One of my most memorable underdogs walked out of jail and into college. Two years later, he came back to tell me how his life dramatically changed after he quit using drugs, left his gang, and moved away. Now married with a child on the way, this student had beaten the odds.

My overall goal is to give all students hope. So often, at-risk students have faced years of failure. Many of them would rather not try than risk failing. I find some area of success and build on that feeling.

One student came into the ALC with failing grades, and he refused to write anything. But as he designed sets for *Romeo and Juliet*, his confidence rose when his classmates bragged on his artistic talent. He wanted that same feeling of success in his writing, and on his next paper he earned an "A" (after checking each sentence with me). He left my class confident and hopeful that he would pass for the year.

Underdogs—sometimes they win, and sometimes they lose, but sometimes their courage just to "show up" deserves its own applause.

Positive Role Models Are Class Acts

Casey Suter • Willbern Elementary School
Reading Recovery • Reading Enrichment

Thinking back on what makes me love the field of education, I remember wonderful role models who inspired me. I was privileged to do my student teaching under Karen Quigley, a clearly outstanding teacher. She loved her job, did what was right for kids, and was generous in sharing her expertise. She always had a smile and encouraging word.

When I started teaching in Cy-Fair nine years ago, I was partnered with Mary Torian and Kathy Kinner, who were both wonderful mentors.

They exhibited the qualities of positive role models that I wanted to mimic.

Four years ago I became a Reading Recovery teacher (receiving special training to develop expertise in teaching the most challenging students to read). Once again, the pattern continued, as my Reading Recovery colleagues became role models whom I admired.

Two years ago I had the opportunity to become Lead Mentor at Willbern Elementary, a position that allows me to work closely with teachers new to the profession and new to our

district. In that position, I try to exemplify the characteristics that I have admired in positive role models. Positive role models display the

values, good citizenship, and personal qualities that set the standards for great schools. Role models are class acts!

For an Ol' Gal, I've Still Got It!

**Mona Gayle Timko • Adaptive Behavior Center
6th through 12th • Language Arts and English**

Each morning, I enter the Adaptive Behavior Center with a sense of eager anticipation. From the moment the students arrive, I am there to greet them, with a smile on my face and pep in my step. There is no doubt the ABC students know that they're the ones who fuel my fire!

Over the 47 years of my teaching experience, my enthusiasm and commitment have not waned for my students, my profession, or my yearning to be the best I can possibly be. My teaching partner and I recognize the value of interacting with our students in ways that encourage their developing positive and productive behaviors—behaviors that will promote their academic success.

Not intending to rest on my laurels, I wholeheartedly participate in a wide variety of staff development opportunities, and I also willingly embrace research-based strategies that increase student achievement.

The staff and students know they can count on me to do whatever it takes to get the job done and to be a constant source of positive energy and productivity. Each day ends much the same as it began—the smile is still on my face and the pep is still in my step (a bit slower, I might add) as I anticipate the next day. There is no doubt the ABC students know that they're the ones who fuel my fire!

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.

Teaching Others What I Had Trouble Learning

Susan L. Bolado • Gleason Elementary School
1st Grade • Language Arts / Reading

As a child, I disliked school because I had a very difficult time learning to read. In fact, I couldn't read until third grade. In tenth grade, I was tested, and we discovered that I had dyslexia. My life changed from that point on, and I knew I didn't want anyone else to go through what I had endured.

I became a teacher to help children learn what I had trouble learning. I took courses in special education and in reading strategies. The keys to making reading successful for children are identifying any special needs early, finding a strategy that works for each individual child, and preventing any discouragement.

As we teach, we always need to remember the lessons we learned, apply the things we have been taught, and take into account that every child is unique.

I know I made the right choice when I see the children's smiling faces and am greeted with hugs each day. The true rewards come when

- a child who could not read is now on-level;
- a special-needs child refrains from a behavior pattern that distracts his attention (such as flapping a hand or staring at a fan) and chooses to read;
- a child who would not talk is now speaking in complete sentences;
- a child who started the year crying now runs to be first in the room;
- a child in a wheelchair is accepted as part of the class; and
- all the children go home knowing they are special and capable of success.

These are the reasons I love my job!

Old-timer

Lee Davis • Watkins Middle School
7th-8th Grades • Science Co-teach

You could call me an "old-timer," as I have been working in this district for almost 36 years. If you measured the time I've spent in education beginning with the year that I started school, this would be my 52nd year to be involved in education in some way, shape, or form.

During my 52 years, I've held these titles:

- Student
- Bus Driver
- Supervisor of Transportation Services
- Assistant Director of Special Transportation
- Substitute Teacher
- Teacher

As you can see, the titles have changed from time to time, but the one title that has remained constant in all these years is "Student."

Yes, I am still learning. I'm learning from co-workers that teamwork is necessary, for anything I do has an effect on them as well. I'm learning from my students how to be a better teacher as they challenge me to find new and better ways to motivate and inspire them to reach their full potential. I'm learning that we don't just teach the content of a course, but we teach about life as well—for without knowing how to get along in society, success in life is not possible.

My father once told me, "You don't stop learning until the day you die." He was, and is, right. We are all "lifelong learners," and we need to take every opportunity to learn as much as we can about life, ourselves, and our craft.

Dreams Do Come True

Peggy Fisher • Goodson Middle School
8th Grade • Algebra I

My love for math started early, when my dad would give my younger sister and me math puzzles to solve as he drove us through the Houston Heights. Thus began my passion for math competition, which would later motivate me to become the Math Club sponsor. Providing balance to that competitive spirit, my mom was my role model for fairness and compassion.

At Helms Elementary, I was inspired to become an educator after learning from gifted teachers like Minnie Knittel and Cecil Schwartz. At Reagan High School I dreamed about being an effective and dedicated math teacher like Margie Scott, from whom I learned geometry.

My dream did come true. After graduating from the University of Houston, I became a math teacher. I have spent close to 30 years at Arnold, then Goodson, while teaching math for 15 summers.

Along the way, I have experienced great professional development sessions, and I've also

helped to pioneer initiatives such as the following.

- A.C.E.
- Summer Academy
- Interdisciplinary Teaming
- Mentoring
- Math Advisory

I have been involved in writing district curriculum, along with exams such as Curriculum-based Assessments and TEKS tests.

In addition, I have learned from outstanding principals like Charles Goodson and Phyllis Hamilton. They helped me keep students as the number-one priority. In 2000, I earned my Master's of Education from Texas A&M .

I recently figured out that I have taught and learned from over 5,000 students—plus my own two children and three grandchildren. I realized that if I have helped even one student achieve success in math and appreciation for math, then my lifelong learning has made a huge dream come true.

Creating Lifelong Learners

Brandi Scott • Bane Elementary School
2nd Grade • Language Arts

Every good teacher develops lesson plans, implements instruction, and even creates a caring classroom environment, all of which are truly important in today's classrooms; however, a teacher's responsibility goes beyond these tasks. There is something much more valuable to tomorrow's future—teaching our children to embrace their learning and to become lifelong learners.

If teachers can instill the power of knowledge, our children can begin to see their academic responsibility and privilege. We must show them that learning occurs in all aspects of life—education is not limited to the classroom walls. To me, that aspect of the learning process is the most intriguing part. Knowledge has the amazing ability to seep into your pores at any

time, even when you least expect it. This idea does not come as a surprise to anyone.

So how do we prepare our children for their lifetime of learning? How do we mold them into continuous learners? The answer is simple. We become their encouragement and inspiration. We become lifelong learners ourselves.

By continuing to grow and adapt my teaching to meet the changing needs of my students, I am setting an example of continuous learning. By modeling this role and embracing knowledge, I am guiding my students down the path of lifelong learning. I have ignited a passion for learning that will burn throughout the future. After all...

"A candle loses nothing of its light by lighting another candle."
Fr. James Keller

Mirror Images of the Past

Joni VandeRiet • Tipps Elementary School
5th Grade

The purpose of learning is growth, and our minds, unlike our bodies, can continue growing as we continue to live.
—Mortimer Adler

Three years ago, I had the opportunity to travel with my 84-year-old grandmother to visit my aunt in Washington, D.C. One of her goals on our trip was to visit her 94-year-old cousin in Annapolis, Maryland. I have to admit that I dreaded this meeting—talking and visiting with relatives that I don't know is really not my cup of tea; however, because I love my grandmother and would do anything for her, I agreed to go.

My grandmother graduated from teacher college in 1938, and her cousin Harold taught at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis for 50 years. Listening to them, I was amazed both at how similar and how different their experiences were to mine.

They are both the epitome of a lifelong learner. I have never known a time when my grandma has not been reading, studying, and learning. She has been my inspiration and my role model. As I continue my career, I see similarities in my own teaching. She taught me early on in life that caring is being firm in the application of rules and that boundaries and structure are important. She gave me a love for learning and a passion for teaching.

Conversing with the two of them on that hot summer day—listening to them reflect on their teaching careers and share notes about what life was like in a one-room schoolhouse—reinforced to me the importance of continuing to learn and grow and the need to pass this knowledge on to my students.

A Grandfather's Dream

Michelle Vicary • Matzke Elementary School
5th Grade • Language Arts & Social Studies

So many people have influenced my life. My family, friends, colleagues, and teachers have had an impact on every decision I have ever made. All of their influence has been greatly appreciated; however, one person—my grandfather—kept coming to my mind as I thought about what to write. Tears poured down my face as I remembered his dream for me.

My grandfather, whom I called Paw Paw, hoped that all of his grandchildren would complete college. He had only attended school through eighth grade when he went to work full-time to help provide for his family after his father's death. With my grandfather's love and support, I became a teacher. I recently finished

my master's, and, as graduation approached, my thoughts continuously turned back to my grandfather's dream.

Without Paw Paw's reassurance, I could not have accomplished this goal. He believed in me and told me that I could do anything if I always made a whole-hearted effort. He acknowledged that I probably would not succeed at everything, but he advised me always to keep trying, because persistence is what makes us learn.

My grandfather was a person who believed that we could make our dreams come true if we tried. My dream is that I influence my students to become lifelong learners, just as Paw Paw encouraged me.

You Teach Best What You Need to Learn

Claudia White • Cook Middle School

Special Education • 6th Grade World Cultures • 8th Grade Language Arts

Each child who enters my classroom is my teacher. I am the person I am because of the lessons my students have taught me. I hope that I have given them as much love, learning, and respect as they have given me.

My first year of teaching I met Ben*, whose parents were told he would never read. I couldn't accept that conclusion. Together, Ben and I learned about the reading process. I haunted the professional journals, and Ben patiently tried everything I handed him. At the end of the year, he rewarded me by reading to the parents at 5th grade graduation. I don't know who was teaching whom. Ben taught me to

search for alternate ways to teach children and never to give up

Katrina* is the student who taught me about the power I hold as a teacher. She was a bright girl who didn't fit the mold of public education. We formed a bond early, so when depression overtook her and she could see no future, she came to me. As we did her schoolwork in a safe environment, I tried to give her hope. I tried to give her power. I tried to give her life. Katrina taught me to be thoughtful and full of care in my interactions with students. She taught me that school is a place to learn how to live as well as to learn how to learn.

I hope I never stop learning from my students.

**names changed to protect privacy*

By Teaching, You Will Learn

Susan Williamson • Arnold Middle School

6th Grade • Reading

- To the eighth grader who shared lunch with me on so many occasions...
- To the college sophomore who wrote in an essay that I, his seventh-grade reading teacher, was one of the three most influential people in his life...
- To the store clerk who said her favorite memory of school was sitting on the floor and listening to me read aloud to her class...
- To the waiter, a former student, who excitedly exclaimed, "I'm going to be a teacher, just like you!"...
- To the professional athlete I once watched play in the junior-high arena and coached in drama...
- To the 16-year-old student whose life was cut short, leaving only classroom memories to cherish...

- To every student who has passed through my doors...

I offer my humblest thanks.

From you I have learned the value of giving my time and lending an ear. I've realized that the impact of a teacher lasts far beyond a single school year. I've come to understand that the skills I teach are often secondary to the environment I create.

I've seen dreams come true and recognize the role I play in nurturing those hopes and aspirations. Most importantly, I've come to appreciate the amazing treasure of each and every day. Nothing should be taken for granted, and tomorrow is never guaranteed. Life is a gift we are privileged to share with each other.

For this education, I'm eternally grateful. My hope is to continue to learn and grow from those who have taught me best: my students. The lessons you've taught will echo for generations.

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.

The Joy of Teaching

Lana Burns • Cy-Fair High School
12th Grade • Government

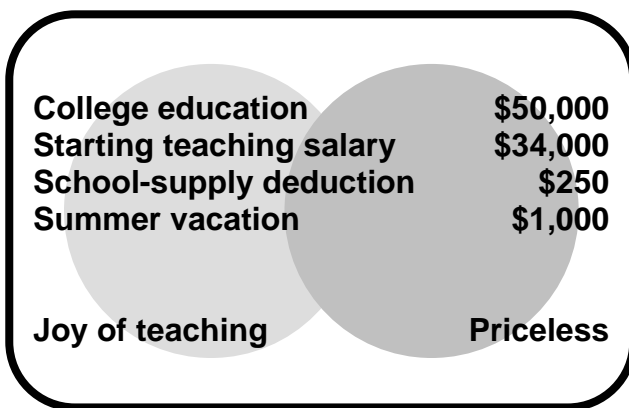
There are so many wonderful influences that have touched my life and my career. I could single out my parents, my sisters, my nieces, my own teachers, my career mentors, my team, my department, my friends—each of these wonderful people has inspired me to be an educator.

I will credit the Cy-Fair school district for its top-notch staff and the atmosphere created by the professionals who surround me and encourage me to be my best. Most of my inspiration comes from the smiles, the laughs, the struggles, and the hope in every student who enters my classroom. I have been so rewarded by the individual accomplishments of each of the young men and women, the band members, various club members, the college-bound athletes, and the future young working professionals who come through the door.

Every day we take a journey together, and each day the trip is more exciting and rewarding

than the day before. I know my career began with a choice made long ago, but the gift I get each day is the reason I am here. The gift is only made possible by this winning combination.

This gift can be summed up by the “commercial” illustrated below:



Working Together = Student Success

Lori Davis • Horne Elementary
3rd Grade • Co-teach • Dyslexia Specialist • Special Education Liaison

When I accepted an assignment as a special education co-teacher at Horne four years ago, I remember feeling excited about the possibilities of working simultaneously with another teacher in the same class, but, at the same time, I felt anxious about sharing a space with someone I had never met before.

When I met Theresa Dean, I knew instantly that I would have a partner who shared my belief in high expectations for all students. We collaborated to create an environment where our students felt valued and successful. Our

students were not separated into general education and special education categories; instead, we chose to share an equal responsibility for every student to ensure academic success.

This year Theresa and I welcomed a new partner, Christine Patel, as part of our co-teach team. The three of us share one common goal: to educate, enrich, and inspire our students to become lifelong learners.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”
—Helen Keller

Teachers Never Work Alone

Carol McIntyre • Hamilton Elementary School
Reading Specialist

I'm a "late bloomer," having started my career in education at age 40. Being a wife and mother and having 13 years of business experience was "value added"—training for tasks to come. These experiences certainly taught me the importance of teamwork.

My first year as a Reading Recovery teacher strengthened my belief in teamwork. I had never taught reading at the primary level. My students needed so much, and I felt that I had little to offer. I kept asking myself, "What did Jane Farney see in me to select me for this program?" The training was a chance of a lifetime, but I needed help from someone who had been in the trenches with struggling readers. Fortunately, Janet Epresi had two students in the program.

I held my lessons in the book room across from Janet's classroom. The time she popped in

to say, "How's it going?" was like a life preserver being thrown to a drowning man. I had observed Janet's teaching and knew she was a valuable resource. At last, I wasn't alone—I had a teammate to help me problem-solve. Together, we analyzed running records (student performance data) and discussed strategies, activities which helped me develop plans for insuring my students' success. Now, I was contributing to the Hamilton team.

I'm now Hamilton's Reading Specialist. As I sit at my desk or walk down the hall, I am often approached by staff members with concerns about their students. I listen and discuss what needs to happen next to make our team successful. Like the times Janet and I worked together, I hope to convey, "They never need to work alone."

Working Together to Make a Difference

Amy Price • Kirk Elementary School
Kindergarten

From my earliest days of playing school with friends at Hancock Elementary, I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I have learned so many new and exciting things since I started teaching.

One of the earliest and most important lessons that I learned was the importance of a strong and supportive team. I believe that being a team player is one of the most important parts of being a successful teacher. After three years as a kindergarten teacher at Kirk Elementary, I was faced with the challenge of bringing in a whole new kindergarten team with my assistant principal. Needless to say, there were a few bumps in the road.

Being the only teacher with Cy-Fair experience, I had to take the leadership role to help ease all of their fears and help them to feel comfortable at Kirk. Now I am blessed with a supportive and caring team! As a teacher I find that every day brings a new challenge, and, as a team, we face these challenges together. We listen to each other and share ideas about how to overcome each new obstacle.

I am very honored to be chosen as Kirk's "Spotlight" teacher, and I feel that the support of my fellow teachers and administrators has helped make me the teacher I am today.

I Can Help

Kathy Schewe • Robison Elementary School
Pre-kindergarten

- “I can help with that.”
- “Here’s an idea you can try.”
- “I think your students might like this activity.”

Cy-Fair encourages administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents to work together. My students and I have benefited from this team approach to education.

This year it has been especially important to be part of a team. Our pre-kindergarten program has blossomed, and so many people have helped. At the beginning of the year, PTO moms helped walk my students to buses. Mrs. Pena, our reading specialist, invites us to visit the animals from the Science Resource Center that she has in her class. “Peaches” the bunny was our favorite.

Ruthie Duderstadt and Brenda Fowlkes, who teach in the Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD), share ideas and materials when I need help teaching a difficult concept.

My assistant principal and principal are always available. They know and love my students. I am also fortunate to work with two of the best paraprofessionals in the district. Shu-Mei Stewart and Diana Roberts are hard-working and kind to students and parents. There is always someone willing to help translate for my Spanish-speaking parents.

As a teacher in the Cypress Fairbanks ISD, I am never alone. Everyone’s working together creates a positive and supportive environment where students and teachers can reach their full potential.

We Can Make a Difference

Jean West • Duryea Elementary School
Kindergarten

Teachers are given the privilege and responsibility of shaping a student’s lifelong attitude towards learning. No single teacher can supply all of the personal and academic needs of each student; it takes a “team” of dedicated individuals, whose sole purpose is to help each child reach his or her full potential.

As educators, we take on this team effort to instill the love of learning in the hearts of our students. Each child is unique, and that individuality is the challenge associated with this great responsibility. Instilling the passion to learn and ensuring that this passion is meaningful take the talent of many diverse educators.

I have always received valuable help and support from my administrators, my immediate

team, as well as from other staff members. Through their assistance and support, they have strengthened me as an educator.

My administrators have challenged me to find the best in each child and have provided opportunities for me to continue learning as a teacher. My colleagues share ideas and help maintain a positive environment. Other staff members are caring, supportive, and willing to assist to make sure every child’s needs are met.

It is a team effort with so many supporting me professionally as well as personally. They all contribute time, ideas, wisdom, and love as they assist me in making a difference in the lives of the students entrusted to me each day. I feel truly fortunate to be a part of such a wonderful team.

Index By Campus

Elementary Schools

Adam	Paul Kessler	14
Ault	Heather Childers	11
Bane	Brandi Scott	30
Bang	Beth Pitts	16
Birkes	Kylee Hummel	12
Copeland	Jeanne Chandler	5
Duryea	Jean West	35
Emmott	Betty Vogtman	9
Farney	Michelle Loveless	15
Fiest	Heather Hurst	13
Francone	John Johnston	13
Frazier	Janise Hollie Brown	21
Gleason	Susan L. Bolado	29
Hairgrove	Terri Richter	17
Hamilton	Carol McIntyre	34
Hancock	April Wright	19
Holbrook	Supriti Srivastava	8
Holmsley	Deborah Chapman	11
Horne	Lori Davis	33
Jowell	Mandy Amato	10
Keith	Suzy Mosher	25
Kirk	Amy Price	34
Lamkin	Donna Ganster	12
Lieder	Terri Elizabeth Ferrell	6
Lowery	Glen Renfro	17
Matzke	Michelle Vicary	31
Metcalf	Kimberly Kerlegan	14
Millsap	Cynthia M. Klepper	15
Moore	Suzanne Crozier	22
Owens	Angela M. Davis	23
Post	Robyn Weigand Missall	7
Reed	Laura McKenna	25
Robison	Kathy Schewe	35
Sampson	Charlotte French	6
Sheridan	Brittney Merz	16
Tipps	Joni Vanderiet	31
Walker	Gina Lynn Marlow	24
Willbern	Casey Suter	27
Wilson	Rose Barnes	5
Yeager	Betsy Warner	19

Middle Schools

Aragon	Laryssa Hunter	12
Arnold	Susan Williamson	32
Bleyl	Kathy Schatte	18
Campbell	Camile R. Chaney	10
Cook	Claudia White	32
Dean	Marisol Guerra Santibañez	17
Goodson	Peggy Fisher	30
Hamilton	Eva J. Purnell	26
Labay	Nina Ortiz Lemmons	24
Thornton	Senisa Keene	7
Truitt	June Benestante	21
Watkins	Lee Davis	29

High Schools

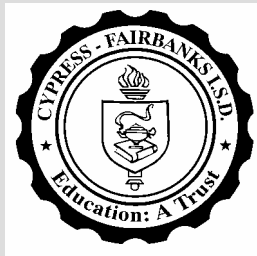
Cy-Fair	Lana Burns	33
Cypress Creek	Christine Adair Tremonte	18
Cypress Falls	Michelle E. Provo	26
Cypress Ridge	Dawn McGuffin Nixon	8
Cypress Springs	Heidi K. LaMore	24
Jersey Village	Kay Evans	23
Langham Creek	Nancy Attaway	20
Windfern	Maggie Dailey	22

Special Programs

ABC	Mona Gayle Timko	28
ALC	Ami Ruby	27
Carlton Center	Jamie E. Allen	20

Spotlight Online

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