



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Ernesto Espino Jr. Teacher expects more, gets more from students every day

“My expectations are very high for academic success,” says Ernest Espino, Jr., of his fifth-grade students at Watson Technology Center for Math and Science. That may sound like a common philosophy for a magnet school teacher, but many of Espino’s students aren’t at Watson to attend the magnet program; they attend because they live in the neighborhood.

“We step it up a notch here. We expose the students to a high academic standard,” he says.

As the product of Garland schools himself, Espino has the opportunity to show his students how hard work – of all kinds – can pay off. After distinguishing himself as a high school football star, Espino was awarded a football scholarship to Jameston College in North Dakota, and earned his bachelor’s degree there.

“I’m able to show my kids what you can do with hard work,” he says. “I tell my students to aim higher – it’s all part of having high expectations of them.”

Espino knows firsthand the power of a positive role model. “In my younger years, I was surrounded by the influence of teachers. My mother was a teacher, and I grew up around that world; it’s a part of me,” he says.

The lessons he learned from his mother have stayed with him and influence him today. “I feel I can make a difference,” he says. “I feel I have a purpose with teaching.”

He puts that purpose into practice every day, setting a tone in the classroom that allows his students to push themselves and achieve. “I try to establish an atmosphere of trust and respect for my students,” Espino says. “I build an individual relationship with each student and provide an environment where they can take risks and find ways around any obstacles they may have. I can truthfully say that every student leaves my classroom with confidence. They can go on to middle school – I guarantee they’ll be ready.”

Several middle-school teachers have contacted him about the students he has prepared for their classes. “Some middle-school teachers have e-mailed me to thank me for preparing the kids so well,” he says.

Earning those accolades is all in a day’s work for Espino. He says he gets students involved by “making the subject matter come alive. I strive to make the concepts memorable,” he says.

Being part of a great team is another key to success, Espino says. “If you surround yourself with great people, good things happen.”

Watson principal Virginia Roberson echoes that philosophy. She says that Espino and the other fifth-grade teachers are good friends as well as coworkers. “The good news is that my campus is filled with outstanding teachers, and Ernie fits right in with our exemplary staff,” she says.

“Mr. Espino is an outstanding teacher. He finds ways to bond with each student as an individual. Because of the ‘connection’ he has with each child, they want to perform for him, and they want to prove to themselves that they can be successful. He treats the students with respect, and they respond by treating him respectfully,” she adds.

Espino’s commitment to his students is recognized by his peers as well, Roberson says, noting his selection as Watson’s Teacher of the Year for 2008-2009. “He was selected by the other teachers at this campus. It’s quite an honor to be chosen by your peers. Because of his recognition, other schools have sent teachers to observe him and to get ideas. He is never hesitant to share ideas, and enjoys networking with others,” she says.

All those attributes certainly add up to teaching – and mentoring – success, and Espino is proof of that. Congratulations to this dedicated, committed and caring teacher.



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