



# PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



## Kerstin Allen

### Garland alumna gives back to schools that helped her grow

At a time when most high school students are trying to decide what direction their lives should take, Lakeview Centennial High School student Kerstin Allen was already well on her way to cementing plans for her future.

As a junior and senior in high school, Mrs. Allen took elementary education classes which provided her the opportunity to assist in a classroom, and she discovered that she loved it. After completing the classes and maintaining a B average, Garland ISD guaranteed her a one-year teaching contract upon college graduation with a bachelors degree and her teaching certification, and she qualified for that.

So, just one week after her December graduation from the University of North Texas, Mrs. Allen started teaching in her own classroom at Hickman Elementary, and she's been at that school ever since.

"I was so encouraged when I realized I could be in Garland and give back to my own community," she says, "although that first half-year was certainly 'trial by fire.' It was the longest four months of my life!"

Perseverance paid off, though, and after teaching kindergarten for one-and-a-half years, she moved to first grade, and has been at that level for the last two-and-a-half years.

"The amount of work a kindergarten teacher has to do is really incredible. As first graders, students are much more independent and take on more responsibility for themselves. There's more small-group instruction, and teaching reading is an amazing experience," Mrs. Allen says.

Growing up in a home "where everything wasn't perfect," Mrs. Allen says, gives her a unique perspective that allows her to build more meaningful relationships with students and their families who are also facing challenges. "I understand their life stresses," she says.

As an elementary school student herself, Mrs. Allen says she was fortunate to have had Jane Siebenthaler as her fourth-grade teacher at

Viola Elementary. "She was the most compassionate woman I ever met. She was really ahead of her time. She taught us so much more than schoolwork. She made each one of us feel special. Being in her class made me want to do more than just learn the material," Mrs. Allen says. The relationship she built with that teacher over two decades ago was so important and long-lasting that Mrs. Allen says she tracked her teacher down and invited her to her wedding. "And she came!" Mrs. Allen says.

It's apparent that Mrs. Allen is having the same kind of effect on her students that Ms. Siebenthaler had on her. Mrs. Allen says she is gratified to have parents of her students tell her, "Before you came here, my child didn't want to go to school, but now he can't wait to get here!"

No doubt her students' excitement about coming to school is a direct result of Mrs. Allen's enthusiasm for her career. "There are days when you leave and can't wait to get home. But I'm always excited to see what the next day will bring," she says. "I love first grade, and I love the team I teach with. I've been approached to teach upper grades, but right now I'm so happy, I can't imagine doing anything else!"

Her commitment is also apparent to those she works with. Hickman Elementary School principal Chris Gray says, "Mrs. Allen is the consummate professional and total team player. Her work ethic sets the standard for the campus as she spends many long hours contributing to school programs, events and PTA functions. Hickman Elementary is a student-centered campus because of the efforts of teachers like Mrs. Allen, and her contributions will continue to shape the school for many years to come."

Hickman and its students are fortunate to have a faculty member as dedicated and passionate about teaching as Mrs. Allen. Congratulations to this deserving Teacher of the Month!



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