



P R E S E N T S T H E TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Kimberly Buchanan **Empathy creates caring, successful teacher, professional says**

Triumphing over adversity helped

Kimberly Buchanan grew into the loving teacher she has become, preparing young children for their own successful school careers.

“I had a very hard school career,” Mrs. Buchanan says. “I cried every day. I just didn’t like school. Nothing tragic happened, but I was unsettled as a young child.”

After such a difficult start in school, some people may have turned away from education altogether. But Mrs. Buchanan saw that early adversity as a foundation for a career in helping others learn to love learning.

“I wanted to give kids a good first school experience and help them like school early on and build a strong educational foundation,” she says. “I remember how I felt scared, afraid. I try to make school fun and safe for my students. I want them to feel comfortable with me, and to know I’m going to be supportive.”

That desire led her to study early childhood education at LaGrange College in Georgia, where she received a bachelor’s degree in 1989. Since then, she has spent her career teaching kindergarten, first and second grades. About 10 years of her 18-year teaching history have been spent at Garland’s Luna Elementary School as a kindergarten teacher. During that time, she has seen the program expand from a half-day to a full-day program.

“Under the half-day program, we struggled to cover the curriculum. No time was left to address the social aspects of kindergarten. Now we can do both well. As a result, the students are better prepared for first grade.”

As the program expanded, expectations grew as well, Mrs. Buchanan says. “Kindergarten is now more what first grade used to be. Students learn all their letters and sounds, and blend sounds. Most read by the end of kindergarten – at least simple sentences and sight words. In math, they learn their numbers, and we work on addition, subtraction, time and even fractions.”

She sees this change as beneficial to the students. “Kids end up adjusting very well to the program, even though there’s a wide variety of experience when they first come to school. Some kids have attended preschool for several years, and some have had no formal educational experience. That makes the first month hard – some kids are still used to taking naps. But by the end of the first month, they’ve learned the routine and by the end of the year, they’re where they need to be.”

Mrs. Buchanan recognizes the challenges inherent in teaching the youngest children. “They’re very dependent. In fact, a lot of teachers who teach older children say they could never teach kindergarten. But because the kids are so dependent, they also want to please. This helps with learning – they naturally want to do well,” she says.

Because kindergarten introduces children to the expectations of formal education, Mrs. Buchanan says teachers have a responsibility to help their students adjust to those expectations. “You have to be very patient, specific and detailed at all times,” Mrs. Buchanan says.

If she were to advise beginning kindergarten teachers, Mrs. Buchanan’s experiences would lead her to say: “Try to remember that all kids are different and come from different backgrounds. You can’t expect all of them to know the same things. Be open to their differences, be very structured and make the learning experience enjoyable – especially in the first months of school. Show them you care about them so they want to come to school. If they feel you’re supporting them, they’ll enjoy school,” she says.

That advice may be built as much on Mrs. Buchanan’s teaching experiences as it was on her own experience as a young student. That strong combination has resulted in a teacher who knows how to create a warm, nurturing environment for her students, who gain a love of school and learning. What better foundation can a teacher provide a student? Congratulations to Kimberly Buchanan, a deserving recipient of Garland ISD’s Teacher of the Month.



Always there when you need us!

www.garlandpower-light.org