



# PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



## Trang Vo Pre-K teacher lays solid foundation for lifelong learning

Her experience teaching adults about

computers showed Trang Vo just how much she loved improving people's lives through sharing her expertise, and that revelation led her to a complete career change that is changing lives at Garland ISD's, Florence Parsons Pre-Kindergarten School.

After graduating from the University of Texas-Austin with a bachelor's degree in business management and information systems, Ms. Vo landed what she thought was her dream job in the corporate world.

"I soon found that it wasn't that much fun, and I thought there was something better for me," she says. The part of her job she did enjoy was training her hires on using the computer system. "I realized I could show somebody something they could remember that would make their lives better," she says, and realized teaching full-time would be a way to make a greater contribution.

Ms. Vo returned to school to get her teaching certification, and part of that certification involved serving as a student teacher. "I taught kindergarten and second grade to see two different grade levels. I realized I liked kindergarten a lot better. There's a whole level of sweetness and innocence in the kids when they're new to school," she says.

A chance conversation at a holiday party alerted the now-certified Ms. Vo to a long-term substitute opening at one of Garland ISD's two pre-K campuses. "I called the school that Monday and went to see Dr. Barnett (the school's principal) with my resume," she says.

Naturally Ms. Vo landed the substitute job, and a full-time position followed at the start of the next school year.

Now in her second full year at Parsons Pre-K, Ms. Vo says the first few days of school are always a challenge. "Because we're entirely a pre-K school, it's half-surreal and half-traumatic in the first few days, both for the teachers and the kids. It's most of the students' first time away from home, so it's a very dramatic change for them," she says of her students, most of whom are four years old.

To help her students adapt to being at school,

Ms. Vo keeps her main goal in mind: "I want my students to learn that their classroom is a safe learning environment. We focus on taking care of each other, and I try to build their social interaction, teaching them to be good friends. Once that's in place, they can learn because they're not fighting with each other."

Ms. Vo helps create a nurturing environment by decorating her classroom with images from her favorite book, "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak. "I recreate a lot of that book and decorate the classroom with it, but I don't overdo it. Once my students start producing their own artwork, I put that up. I feel their work is more important – they like to see it up, and so do their parents when they visit," Ms. Vo says.

Ms. Vo has two classes of about 20 pre-K students each day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Parsons Pre-K is one of two pre-K schools in the Garland ISD, each with approximately 600 students. She says that the curriculum doesn't include instruction in reading or math, but rather in familiarizing students with colors, shapes, letters, and numbers.

"The population that comes to our school may not have teaching resources at home, so they come here to build that foundation," she says. "It's good that we're here to help bring those students up to speed and get them ready for kindergarten."

Ms. Vo says she has challenged herself to give every student individual attention every day. "Some of my students come from big families and may not get the attention they need to develop their language skills, so I make sure to talk individually to every kid, one-on-one, to help them."

Over the course of the school year, Ms. Vo says she sees a nearly magical transformation take place as a disparate group of kids becomes a tight-knit unit. "By the end of the year, we all care about each other. It's really sad for me to hear them talk about where they're going to be the next year."

Unlike her corporate job, Ms. Vo has found that teaching has been everything she expected and more. Her self-motivation and enthusiasm will no doubt pay dividend for her pre-K students for years to come.



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