



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



Val Spears

Building relationships, changing lives

Effective teamwork leads to success, and

Val Spears, third-grade bilingual teacher at Nita Pearson Elementary, proves it every day.

According to Pearson principal Vicki DeVantier, “Val builds relationships with families from the beginning. They know she has their child’s best interests at heart.”

Mrs. DeVantier says Mrs. Spears shows students’ families that she needs their involvement to ensure student success, and she goes the extra mile to enable that involvement. Mrs. Spears gives parents her cell phone number and invites them to contact her at any time with concerns or questions. She also heads up a bilingual parent night near the end of the year to let parents know how they can help keep their children on track and prepare them for the following year. In addition, she works with the after-school Accelerated Math and Accelerated Reading programs to help students achieve grade level in those subjects. When she realized that more time with students was needed to help them reach their goals, she volunteered to teach on Saturdays. Extra mile? Make that extra miles!

Mrs. Spears’ path to teaching was not the typical one. In fact, Pearson Elementary’s gain was the corporate world’s loss. As a project manager for a technology firm, Mrs. Spears’ career had grown into one requiring a steady travel schedule, and she found she wasn’t home to care for her own family. Her experience volunteering with the PTA at her daughter’s school revealed to her how much she loved the school atmosphere, and her husband encouraged her to pursue this interest. The Region X certification program allowed her to fast-track her dream.

As a child, Mrs. Spears grew up in a Spanish-speaking home and “I had very little English when I started kindergarten,” she says, and sympathized with students who faced that same challenge. Consequently, she earned her bilingual certification and now serves as the lead bilingual teacher for the third-grade team at Pearson.

In that role, Mrs. Spears works with Spanish-speaking students who begin the year with a 30 percent English – 70 percent Spanish proficiency, and with a 80-20 ratio by the end of the year.

Mrs. Spears has also implemented multi-grade bilingual meetings so students and their families get to know the whole team, she says, for stronger team building.

Her personal teaching goals stretch well beyond the elementary years, however. “In some families, the goal is just to get the student through school until they’re old enough to work. What we’re trying to instill in them now is the desire to graduate. We try and teach them that school is important, and even at this level, we talk about college. It’s never too young to plant that seed,” she says.

Her ultimate goal, though, is to expand this mindset in a more formal way. “I’d like to find a way to identify the high-risk kids early, and follow them all the way through high school. I’d like to work to help them find ways to stay in school and work as well, if that’s necessary for their family, without losing sight of the goal of graduating, and then help them find ways to make college a reality as well.”

Congratulations to Val Spears for her dedication, creativity, and commitment to laying the ground work for her students’ lifelong success.



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