



# PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



## Carolyn Andres Teaching veteran shares perspectives on education and teaching goals

For Carolyn Andres, her teaching

career all started when VISTA expanded her vista. After two years at North Texas State University majoring in sociology, she knew she wasn't really going anywhere. She heard about an opportunity to work with kids through the Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) program, signed up, and spent three months in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands teaching elementary-aged kids basic skills. "That really inspired me to be a teacher," she says.

Her parents played a part as well: her father was a high school and middle school teacher and football coach, and her mother worked with kids at the Denton State School. "I got interested in special education through her," Mrs. Andres says.

During her 36-year career, all of which has been spent in the Garland school district where she currently teaches special-needs kids in fourth and fifth grades at Back Elementary School, Mrs. Andres has found that the most rewarding field has been teaching children with learning challenges.

"I love helping these kids. They're so eager to learn, and I've learned to be creative in my methods to inspire them," she says, crediting a sense of humor as the best way to reach her students. "I try to make the lessons fun and relevant."

Improving students' reading ability is one of Mrs. Andres' main goals. "I try to teach them to love to read. Some have never read a whole book. We work on phonics and reading skills, such as main idea and summarizing," she says. "All that is great preparation for TAKS," which all of her students take.

Working with special-needs students means juggling a lot of different needs, Mrs. Andres says. "Every day is different – and sometimes it feels like a three-ring circus," she says.

Each day, her conference period, the last period of each day, is devoted to making sure her students

are well organized for completing homework or being prepared for tests.

"We make sure they're caught up on their school work and that their assignments are written down. Organization is one weakness we really work on," she says.

After three and a half decades of teaching, Mrs. Andres has seen enormous change take place in the teaching profession. From her perspective, she says she would suggest to new teachers that they "go in with an open mind, be flexible. Learn that every day is not that same, and be willing to work with the kids you have."

She says that last bit of advice might be the most important: "It's important to recognize that not every student is going to achieve at the same level. Recognize the individual and don't lump them all into one category. Just because students are in the fifth grade doesn't mean they're all ready at the same level at the same time."

The contributions Mrs. Andres has made at Back Elementary School have reverberated throughout the school, says principal Karen Jordan.

"Mrs. Andres exemplifies all the characteristics of a master teacher. Her ability to effectively connect with a diverse student population and meet each child's individual needs is seen in all of her interactions with students, parents and staff. Her high expectations for her students and herself are matched only by her loving, caring manner. She is a cornerstone for our students' success at Back Elementary," she says.

Even in light of her long tenure, Mrs. Andres says she isn't ready to pass the baton quite yet. "Every year I say it's my last, but now I'm teaching fourth and fifth grade, and I see who's coming up. There are a lot of sweet kids. Plus all my co-workers are friends, and I don't want to leave that. We're a big family here at Back Elementary," she says.

With any luck, the students and faculty at Back Elementary won't have to say goodbye anytime soon to this outstanding, committed teacher.



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