



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Nancy Brightwell Life experience, learning led to teacher's unique professional path

"You know why

I like coming here? Because I get it." Nancy Brightwell, educational diagnostician at Southgate Elementary school says those words, spoken by one of her students about his experience in her class, truly touched her.

When Mrs. Brightwell was considering teaching, "A friend told me, 'Nancy, your wallet will never be full, but your heart will.'" Those words turned out to be prophetic for a teacher who knows she is finally fulfilling her calling.

Mrs. Brightwell's path to teaching wasn't a direct one. In fact, she received her undergraduate degree from the University of North Texas in psychology, then worked in social services.

"My experience showed that children became the least of troubled adults' problems. Many services were available to adults, but not so many for children. I also discovered that many people I dealt with became vulnerable to violence because of educational differences. I decided to go into special education to help with the root of those problems," she says.

Her teaching career began just four years ago at Garland ISD's Handley Elementary after she earned her teaching certification through Texas A&M Commerce. She also obtained her masters degree in special education from there as well. Brief as her career at Handley may have been, she made such an impact that she was named the school's Teacher of the Year last year.

This year, Mrs. Brightwell has redefined her role, serving as a diagnostician. "When students are having difficulty achieving in class, they are referred to me by teachers or parents. I work with the students to

determine their needs. Once those are determined, I work with the team of parents and teachers so that everyone involved knows what the plan is and what to do to help the student," she says.

As much as she already loves her new role, Mrs. Brightwell says she misses her students. "I loved the relationships I built with the students. That was the most rewarding part and the part I miss the most. I'm still checking up on my former students." Those relationships became even stronger than the typical student-teacher bond because "in special ed, you have the luxury of having the same students several years in a row," she says.

As difficult as it was to leave those classroom experiences behind, Mrs. Brightwell says becoming an educational diagnostician was a natural step for her. She says two things led to her move: her own life and career experiences, in the form of her background in working with victims of domestic abuse and the fact that her daughter is dyslexic; and her educational background in psychology. "I've always been interested in how the brain works and why it behaves differently in different people," she says.

"I wanted to work with at-risk kids to help redirect them and help them realize we all have gifts, though they are all different kinds of gifts. I believe you can always find something, some gift they can be proud of and that can help them be successful," she says.

Spoken like an educational professional whose heart truly is full. Congratulations to Nancy Brightwell, an outstanding educator whose care and commitment have earned her the additional distinction of being named Garland ISD Teacher of the Month.



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