



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



Paige Cox Dedicated teacher delights in celebrating students' successes

It's not every teacher whose students can't wait to start learning each day, or who beg for homework. But that's just the delightful attitude Paige Cox encounters in her students every day.

A special education teacher of 11 fourth- and fifth-grade students, Ms. Cox says, "I love teaching special ed. My kids jump off the bus each day, excited. They can't wait to find out what they're going to learn about. How can you not love that?"

Ms. Cox teaches in the LIFE (Learning in a Functional Environment) program at Shugart Elementary School that equips special ed students of varying abilities to face the challenges that are presented by the real world. "We spend time on structured academics, but most of our efforts are on life skills, lessons that will help them with daily living. Our goal is to make them as independent as possible, and to be ready for high school," she says.

Meeting that goal fills her days, Ms. Cox says, and it's gratifying to see her students making progress. "When they make even the smallest progress, it's time for a party!" she says. "It's fun to see their growth and celebrate their accomplishments."

Ms. Cox's path to teaching was a circuitous one. "In high school, I always knew I wanted to teach. The mother of a good friend of mine was a special ed teacher, and I would hear about her day with her students. She always had such a passion in her voice about it, and hearing that really inspired me. But then in college, I fell in love with anthropology," she says. She assumed she would pursue a career in archaeology and anthropology, "but then I came back where I was supposed to be: to teaching."

After earning her bachelors degree at Stephen F. Austin University, she taught for about five years in the special education program in the Dallas ISD. "Then I moved to Garland, and I had always dreamed of living in the same community

where I worked. I discovered there was an opening at Shugart, met Dr. Raney, and fell in love with the school," Ms. Cox says.

Shugart principal Dr. Lura Raney is equally enthusiastic about the contributions Ms. Cox has made to the school. "She truly cares about each child, and knows about each one's strengths and weaknesses. She goes beyond the call of duty to ensure that all of her students are receiving the very best education possible," Dr. Raney says.

Addressing those strengths and weaknesses is one of the most challenging aspects of her position, Ms. Cox says. "The students have a wide variety of abilities, which means no two students are ever working on the same thing. They all have their own educational programs, so we work with each one individually. Having two great assistants makes that possible." Assistants Cynthia Dyson and Mary Garcia work with Ms. Cox throughout the day.

Another important aspect of her students' educations is parent support, and Ms. Cox says she is blessed to have that as well. "All the parents have my home and school phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and I encourage them to feel comfortable in contacting me for any reason," she says.

That communication goes both ways. "From the smallest thing, such as forgetting their spelling lists, to more important problems, such as a behavior issue, I really do keep in touch with my students' families," Ms. Cox says.

That involvement pays off for Ms. Cox and her students outside of the classroom as well. "I get invited to my students' baseball games and birthday parties. Being involved in their lives means so much to me," she says.

Her passion for teaching and for each of her students fuels her commitment to her profession. Congratulations to Garland ISD's Teacher of the Month, Paige Cox, a true asset to her school and her students.



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