



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Helen Ragsdale Teacher puts experience to the test for elementary students

With more than 25 years of teaching Garland ISD elementary students on her resume, Helen Ragsdale says her best advice to new teachers is to be organized and prepared, then be ready to toss it all aside if students aren't responding to your well-planned methods.

Being a successful teacher means being flexible, Ragsdale says. A good teacher "spends a lot of time preparing lessons, but if that preparation doesn't work for the kids, you have to be ready to change what you're doing," she says. "You have to be prepared to try new things while building on the old."

Spoken like a veteran. This third-grade reading teacher considers herself fortunate to be part of the Sewell Elementary faculty, where teachers, even at this early grade level, are specialized. Instead of one teacher having the same 20 students all day for all subjects, students move among the staff for a variety of subjects.

"We've been doing this at Sewell for more than five years," Ragsdale says, and her experience in implementing and executing the program has shown it to be a success. She says TAKS scores have steadily improved through the years, and last year, Sewell earned the top "Exemplary" level.

"We're on a good trajectory, improving every year," she says, though Ragsdale stresses the importance of looking beyond "the test" to gauge true educational success.

"Our challenge isn't to put so much focus on TAKS. One test shouldn't say if a kid is a good student or not. So I tell my kids, 'This is just a test and don't let it upset you. Just do what you've been doing all along.' My focus is on helping children become the best readers they can be, and love reading. I try to show them that I'm excited about reading and pass along that enthusiasm."

She warns that sometimes even the best students haven't discovered the joy of reading, and that's a situation she works to change. "I try to discover topics they're interested in, then introduce them to books that reflect those interests," she says.

No matter how committed she is during the school day, Ragsdale says that one of the most important elements of student success is parental involvement. She says it's critical for "school and home to work together," and to achieve that, Ragsdale encourages open communication with parents.

"I share with them that I'm a parent too, and let them know that their support is needed," she says.

Ragsdale encourages parents to set aside time without distractions during which they can work with their children. "This can be a time for reading, or for working on math problems, and they can make it fun. Parents can talk with their kids, and see where they are, where they need help," she says.

"I really love what I do," Ragsdale says. "I see former students who are doing well, and they're like my babies, all grown up."

Her passion for teaching hasn't gone unnoticed at Sewell. Principal Susan Craig says she's "a master teacher...caring and nurturing. She has high expectations for all her students and motivates them to reach those expectations. Helen believes it is her job to instill an urgency and passion for learning. Her desire is to help students understand that commitment and perseverance can create change, and with change and education comes unlimited possibilities. Helen Ragsdale is a vital part of Sewell Elementary."

Congratulations to Ragsdale, a committed and passionate teacher and the deserving recipient of the Teacher of the Month award.



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