



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Jessica Rodriguez Educational detour puts teacher on rewarding path

When Jessica Rodriguez's career veered off its original course, the world might have lost a psychologist, but it gained a terrific teacher for special needs students.

Rodriguez, a San Antonio native, took a short drive north on Interstate 35 to attend Texas State University-San Marcos and majored in psychology and Spanish. Part of that educational coursework included an internship at a brain-injury rehabilitation center.

Fate certainly had a hand in that internship. "The traumatic brain rehab center served all ages, but I ended up with the kids," she says.

"I followed them all day, and spent a lot of time in the classroom with them and with the center's special education teacher. She had me do a lot of teaching, and I just loved it," Rodriguez says.

She also came into contact with several doctors during that internship, and "all the ones I worked with had gone to the University of North Texas," so when her studies were complete in San Marcos, she continued her trek north on I-35 to Denton and earned her masters in education there, with a specialization in emotional behavior disorders.

Rodriguez says she met several people at UNT who were familiar with Garland ISD, and "I heard what a great district it was," she says.

The rest, as they say, is history. "I'm in my fifth year at Stephens Elementary. I love it here," Rodriguez says of her serendipitous career move.

As a reading, writing and math specialist, Rodriguez oversees individualized lesson plans for about 20 students. She works with teams of classroom teachers and other support staff to create customized courses of

study for her students, and she is responsible for tracking their success throughout the year.

Rodriguez says that continuing education and plenty of patience are two important keys to success as a special education teacher.

"I encounter new things every day, and try to learn as those new experiences occur," she says. "Not every strategy works with every student, so it's important to be patient and understanding. But when that light bulb goes on, that's the biggest reward."

Rodriguez seems quite certain that those light bulbs wouldn't go on at all if it weren't for her most important educational partners – her students' parents.

"Parents are definitely part of the team. I have a great group, and they really support what we do for our students," she says. "We encourage that family involvement through phone calls or e-mails nearly every day, and through weekly homework folders."

Rodriguez says that after five years in the same elementary school, many of her students have moved on to junior high and high school, where she keeps apprised of their success through updates provided by siblings and other teachers.

"It's extremely rewarding to hear about their success. It really helps me feel that I'm making a difference," she says.

"My students are amazing. They are precious gifts to me. Being able to work with them every day is so rewarding."

No doubt Rodriguez's students are every bit as grateful for the role she plays in their lives. Congratulations to this committed and passionate teacher, and this month's Garland ISD Teacher of the Month.



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