



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Sheila McComas

Weaver Elementary

Sheila McComas leads the cheers for Weaver Elementary's PPCD kids

There's nothing average about the life of Sheila McComas.

Mrs. McComas, an 18-year classroom veteran, teaches the Pre-School Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD) at Weaver Elementary School. The 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds under her tutelage face such challenges as physical handicaps, Down syndrome, autism and speech impairment. With the assistance of "my two wonderful aides," she deals with the challenge of planning productive activities for such a diverse group of girls and boys.

"There's really no typical day," she says. "It's different every day."

Others might be daunted by the daily test of their creativity and flexibility, but Mrs. McComas relishes it. Her energy is focused on showing the youngsters what they can accomplish, not what they can't.

"I love teaching special ed, and I really like this age group," she says. "Some of the kids are just now blossoming and realizing the things they can do, and that's what makes it worthwhile."

Inclusiveness is an important theme at Weaver, and Mrs. McComas applauds the school's administration, teachers and students for involving her kids in regular school activities. Coming up is Rodeo Day for pre-K and kindergarten students. There will be all sorts of hands-on activities, including racing stick horses and painting brands.

But it's not just big events that bring PPCD children and their peers together.

"We do a lot with pre-K and kindergarten students," she says. For example, PPCD students go to recess and have "center time" activities, such as doing puzzles and playing with blocks, with other pre-K students.

Welcoming questions and explaining differences also help to erase fears and prejudices. When someone wanted to know if a PPCD child's standing frame (an apparatus designed to help her stand upright) hurt, Mrs. McComas let the inquisitive student test it out. Then everyone wanted to take a turn.

"After that, when students from other classes saw it, they knew what it was, they knew what it did. They understood and accepted it. It was no big deal."

But some things are big deals, and when a PPCD student reaches a milestone, everyone celebrates.

"When a child who was not walking at all finally walks down the hall without assistance, it's a major accomplishment. And what's neat is that everyone in the school is aware of what he or she did, and the whole school is like a cheerleading team," says Mrs. McComas.

Helping children with special needs is a lifelong passion, sparked by her mentally challenged sister, Margaret. Growing up in Arlington, Mrs. McComas volunteered for Special Olympics and other programs. At Texas Woman's University, she opted for special education certification.

That career choice has had a profound impact on all aspects of her life.

She is married to Mark McComas, a Garland native who is a co-owner of Courtesy Cleaners. They have five daughters: Brandy, 4; Alex, 6, a first-grader at Weaver; Kelly, 9; Chelsey, 11, a fifth-grader at Weaver; and Stacy, 14.

Kelly has cerebral palsy and goes to special classes in Garland.

Her special education expertise enables Mrs. McComas to make a claim that few women can: "My career prepared me for being a mom."



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