



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Michelle Runyan Educator born to teach, lead, finds niche in Garland middle school

With 18 years of teaching experience to her credit, Michelle Runyan, seventh-

grade math teacher at Sam Houston Middle School and this month's Garland ISD Teacher of the Month, has worked with students of all ages.

"I haven't found a grade level yet that I don't like to teach, and I've worked with first grade up to adults," Ms. Runyan says. She even taught teachers when she worked as Microsoft's educational liaison, instructing co-workers on newly implemented hardware and software.

Her experience at Sam Houston has taught her one important lesson: "I fell in love with middle-school kids. It's a difficult time for them, but it can be a fun time. There are so many changes, they're figuring out who they are, and we're prepping them for high school. A lot of people find it frustrating to work with this age group, but I fell in love with them," she says.

Ms. Runyan also serves as a mentor for beginning teachers. She says she suggests that they approach each student as an individual. "You have to remain flexible and positive. Teachers need to get information about each student, and act with the student, not react to them."

Her classroom practices help motivate and inspire her students to achieve classroom goals every day. "I'm big with tickets and stars," she says, noting that students earn tickets on an individual basis for coming to class prepared, participating in the lesson, and for doing their work. The tickets can be redeemed for candy and school supplies.

Stars are awarded on a classroom-wide basis. "If the class is having a good day, staying on task, they get a star on the wall chart for their class. Five stars can be redeemed for an ice cream sundae party," Ms. Runyan says. The frequency with which she brings ice cream to school proves the program's effectiveness. "I buy a lot of gallons of ice cream," she says. "Middle school students will work for food!"

During her two years at Sam Houston, one of Ms. Runyan's most important goals has been to improve the school's seventh-grade math TAKS scores. When she started at the school, a new math lab program

was implemented. This program provides students who had previously failed the math portion of the TAKS test with a second math class each day. In their math lab, these students focus exclusively on TAKS objectives, and Ms. Runyan describes the curriculum as dissecting math. "We cover the same topics as their regular math course, but we supplement the regular lessons with games and interactive programs that make the lessons come alive."

The success of the math lab program has already been proven: "We had a 19 percent increase in seventh-grade math TAKS after the first year, so it's definitely worth the work that goes into it," Ms. Runyan says. "Garland was being very insightful to realize a program like this was needed, and it was a tremendous step on Garland's part to help the students this way."

Aside from her regular teaching schedule, Ms. Runyan is available for before- and after-school tutorials, as well as teaching ESL math classes. "A ten-hour day is average," she says.

Though she has had great success already in Sam Houston's math program, Ms. Runyan says her ultimate goal is to become a middle-school principal. "These kids have so much potential, and it's a critical time. In the long run, you have to have the strong belief that you can help students learn that learning can be fun. If you motivate the students to want to learn intrinsically, they can discover ideas that lead to things they're interested in," she says. She has earned her master's degree in administration, and has also completed Garland's administration academy, so she's well on her way to reaching her goal.

Ms. Runyan says she always knew she wanted to teach. "I love people, and I've always been active and involved. Working with people has always been near and dear to me, and I have my parents to thank for that. My father never met a stranger, and he passed that on to me," she says.

Whether Ms. Runyan continues to share her passion for learning in the classroom or as an administrator, she will no doubt continue to find ways to inspire students to be their best. Sam Houston - and Garland ISD - is fortunate to have a dedicated, caring professional such as Michelle Runyan leading students to academic and personal success.



Always there when you need us!

www.garlandpower-light.org