



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Kathy Sullivan

Montclair Elementary
School in Garland

Second time's a charm for Kathy Sullivan

Only about half of all working Americans are satisfied with their careers, according to a study conducted by Monster.com, an online job search company. Montclair Elementary School teacher Kathy Sullivan discovered her perfect career on just the second try.

When Mrs. Sullivan and her husband, Kevin, moved to Garland over a dozen years ago, she left a career as a medical assistant behind in her native New England. Her mother-in-law, Ann Sullivan, named a Dallas Teacher of the Year, convinced her to consider teaching as a career after the Sullivans' second son was born.

Luckily for fourth-grade students at Montclair Elementary School in the Garland Independent School District, Mrs. Sullivan listened. She earned her teaching certificate 12 years ago, and has been happily teaching ever since.

Mrs. Sullivan spent her first six years teaching language arts in middle school. When her best friend moved to Montclair Elementary, she encouraged Mrs. Sullivan to make the move with her — and she has been there for the last six years.

"I really enjoy the younger kids," Mrs. Sullivan says. "I feel like I can do so much more with them, and have a bigger impact on their lives. At the elementary level, you really feel that you're accomplishing something with your students."

At Montclair, fourth grade is "departmentalized," Mrs. Sullivan says, meaning she teaches only language arts and history.

"This system gets kids ready for the idea of changing classes for each subject, which they do in fifth grade and beyond," she says.

Mrs. Sullivan has definitely found her niche. As part of the four-member grade-level teaching staff, Mrs. Sullivan helped the school's fourth grade earn a 99 percent passing rate on the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) writing test in 2002. The score represented a 20-point jump, which was made possible by her team's

commitment to teaching writing, an important facet of the fourth-grade TAKS test.

"Teaching writing is one of my greatest challenges," Mrs. Sullivan says. "Our goal is to get students to believe in themselves as writers."

Part of that challenge comes from teaching students how to express themselves clearly and logically on paper, without diminishing their creativity. "They have to learn to get words on paper with confidence."

Another part of the TAKS test is grammar, punctuation and spelling, which the team spent a great deal of time on as well.

"Montclair students were well prepared, so they did very well on that," Mrs. Sullivan says.

Montclair Principal Suzanne Hill says one teacher stood out in her mind when she was asked to recommend a teacher of the month. "I chose Kathy because she exemplified the qualities of an outstanding teacher," Ms. Hill says. "She always puts her students first, supporting them emotionally and academically."

Her admiration of Mrs. Sullivan goes beyond the classroom. "Kathy is a wonderful team member, and she's the kind of teacher who doesn't say, 'That's all I can do' but instead says, 'What else can I do?'"

"She has a positive attitude. She's a collaborator. She's always seeking solutions," Ms. Hill says.

That positive attitude radiates in her classroom.

"I love the hugs I get every day, all the sweet and loving kids I have in my classes," says Mrs. Sullivan. "I love seeing them change and grow, master skills, and know I've played a part in leading them to success."

She keeps up with her "graduates" through student visits and reports from younger siblings. Though her younger son will soon be out of school himself, Mrs. Sullivan says she plans on teaching at least another 10 years or more.



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