

Lamar CISD elementary teacher of the year, Debbie Nesbitt, and secondary teacher of the year, Brittany Pineda



Julia Beltran was named Fort Bend ISD's ESL teacher of the year



THE **APPLES** OF FORT BEND



Lamar CISD honored all of its teachers at a recent awards ceremony

By Jennifer Heath

If school districts started handing out grades to educators, these teachers would have earned an A+. Recently honored by Fort Bend ISD and Lamar CISD, these teachers of the year have distinguished themselves as top educators. The process of choosing the winners begins with each school selecting a campus teacher of the year. A selection committee for both school districts reviews the entries, conducts personal interviews, observes the finalists teaching in their classrooms, and then selects the winners. The elementary and secondary winners will progress to the regional competition and possibly the statewide teacher of the year program.

Fort Bend ISD

Christine Hetherington

*Elementary Teacher of the Year
Dulles Elementary
Kindergarten*

Christine Hetherington loves what she does and it shows. She has been teaching for 23 years and has tried her hand at everything from kindergarten to fifth grade. "I have a real desire to help others and to make a difference for kids,"



John De La Cruz was named Fort Bend ISD's bilingual teacher of the year

SCHOOLS

Lamar CISD and Fort Bend ISD Honor Outstanding Teachers of the Year



Fort Bend ISD elementary teacher of the year, Christine Hetherington, and secondary teacher of the year, Lora Bothell with district administrators

she says. "Once I began teaching, I realized that this is the only profession for me. Being able to teach fills my heart with joy."

Hetherington earned a Bachelor of Arts in teaching and early childhood education from the University of Northern Iowa and a Master of Education from the University of Houston. She has been teaching for seven years at Dulles Elementary. When she learned she had won Fort Bend's prestigious award, she was shocked. "I hope that I was picked for the same reasons that I admire my peers," she says. "I have a passion for teaching and learning, a desire to help others, and the ability to inspire my students."

Hetherington wants to continue sharing her love of learning with her students and fellow educators for many years to come. "Every child who leaves my classroom, who loves learning, who loves themselves, and who wants to help the world around them are all my greatest accomplishments."

Lora Bothell

*Secondary Teacher of the Year
Sartartia Middle School
Sixth Through Eighth Grade*

During her first two years of school, Lora Bothell got labeled as one of 'those' kids. The off-task kid. The talkative kid. The behavior-problem kid. In second grade, though, her teacher labeled Bothell as something else. "My teacher made me feel like I was the smartest student in the class, and she gave me the confidence to attempt any academic challenge," Bothell says. "In second grade, I was considered to be energetic, happy, social, and intelligent. My teacher changed the way I saw myself, and in doing so, she changed my life."

That stuck with her. She earned a Bachelor of Science in early childhood from the University of Houston at Clear Lake. She went on to gain a Master of Education in educational administration from Concordia University - Texas. She's been a teacher for the past 18 years and is currently the sixth- through eighth-grade special education teacher at Sartartia Middle School.

"I have learned that everyone, regardless of age or circumstance, wants the same thing. Everyone wants to feel authentically connected to someone who respects them and unconditionally appreciates them for exactly who they are," she says. "I believe that every child deserves to be cherished just for being themselves. Children learn and develop to their maximum potential when they feel connected, safe, and respected."

John De La Cruz
Bilingual Teacher of the Year
Juan Seguin Elementary
Fourth Grade Bilingual
Education Self-Contained

John De La Cruz knows education doesn't stop when his students walk out of school. He has learned that to create successful students, he needs to create a great support network for the children. "I decided to become a teacher, because I enjoy working with children. I decided to become a bilingual teacher, because I wanted

to make a difference in my community," he says. "I feel that being bilingual and biliterate is a gift. I feel that knowing at least two languages - any two languages - is important, because it helps better prepare a child to become more competitive in our global world and economy."

De La Cruz has been teaching for seven years. When he found out he was the bilingual teacher of the year, he was honored and surprised. "To have made a positive impact on someone's life and to see the growth each child makes academically and with the English language in my class are by far my greatest accomplishments as an educator," De La Cruz says. "I really enjoy what I do. I am also involved with my community and make sure I go above and beyond for the children."

Julia Beltran
ESL Teacher of the Year
Jan Schiff Elementary
Kindergarten Through Fifth
Grade

When Julia Beltran heard she had been named this year's ESL teacher of the year, she had a mental picture of all of her students smiling. And since this is her 31st year of teaching, that's a lot of smiling faces to think about. "Initially, when I heard I was chosen, I thought about all of the outstanding teachers that were standing next to me," Beltran says. "I felt honored just to be in their presence. I also thought about all of the children that I teach daily."

After her decades in the education field, Beltran has learned to embrace diversity and listen to her heart. "At the present time, we have many students that are coming from different countries, and I strongly believe in teaching from the heart and always remembering why we teach," she says. "When I look back at my teaching adventure, I have come to realize that I have touched many lives. I have also met remarkable individuals who have touched my heart, as well. I will continue to be a voice for

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my English language learners in any capacity that I can.”

Lamar CISD
Brittany Pineda

*Secondary Teacher of the Year
Lamar Consolidated High School
Chemistry and AP Biology*

Brittany Pineda was tired of hearing the same thing: “Science is too hard. It’s impossible...” “As a biology major, I wanted to show others that understanding science is an obtainable goal and that science could be fun,” she says. “The best way I knew of to spread that message was to actually get in the classroom and show students myself.” As a child, Pineda never imagined herself becoming a teacher. But that’s what she’s been doing for the past seven years. In addition to loving the world of science, Pineda is working on gaining full fluency in a foreign language. Eventually, she wants to teach foreign language and science.

She says she was shocked to learn she had been selected

as the school district’s secondary teacher of the year for 2009-2010. “My greatest accomplishments are my students,” she says. “I am not naïve enough to think that every student who walks into my room yearns to be a scientist, but if they leave my classroom at the end of the year with an appreciation for learning in general and the ability to think through difficult problems logically, then I feel successful.”

Debbie Nesbitt
*Elementary Teacher of the Year
Campbell Elementary
Second Grade*

Debbie Nesbitt is a health nut in more ways than one. The second-grade teacher has transformed the Lamar CISD district into one that teaches its students in kindergarten through fifth grade about keeping their bodies healthy, active, and full of good energy.

“Healthy children attend school, are sick less often, learn better, and have a more positive

outlook,” she says. “I incorporate fitness and breathing exercises into the day to help the kids think more clearly, focus, and stay alert. People die from obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, not because they cannot read or write. Therefore, teaching young children about such health topics is crucial.”

Nesbitt has created dozens of lesson plans that are utilized through the district’s elementary classrooms about a spectrum of health topics. She started an H1N1 rap contest, designed sleep logs for students to record how many “Z”s they get each night, and shared information about special days such as Don’t Fry Day and Make Movement Day.

But Nesbitt didn’t stop with the students. She looked at her fellow teachers and challenged them to become healthier, too. She co-created the employee wellness program, which was named Health Nuts, where staff can meet to speak, support, encourage, and answer any

health questions. “The rewards of teaching, for me, range from a simple ‘ah-ha’ moment during a math lesson to something more moving like a student’s father who quit smoking due to the lesson I taught on tobacco and the encouragement of his son,” Nesbitt says.

“Many children stop me in the hall filled with excitement, enthusiasm, and pride when they tell me how they have increased their fitness level, ate a healthy meal, tried the fruit or vegetable of the month, participated or trained for the kid triathlon they learned about in class, slept for 10 hours, or even to show me a healthy food choice they made. To know that I make a difference in children’s lives and that young children look up to me with such admiration and want to improve their lifestyle because of me is extraordinary.” **SLM**

JENNIFER HEATH is a certified teacher, who now stays at home to learn with her two sons, Landry and Ryan.



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