

Katy's Homegrown Teachers

Katy teachers share their love of teaching for the district they grew up in

Written by Kenzie Stanfield

Photography by Jason Lehecka

As children, we all have big aspirations on what we want to be when we grow up. Whether those dreams change weekly or we know early on what we were meant to do, sometimes they become reality.

How incredible it is that many of the finest people in Katy are realizing their dreams by serving, engaging, and molding the children of future generations in some of the very classrooms where they grew up themselves?

Dreams Become Reality

Teachers are said to be ordinary people with extraordinary gifts. Some have been gifted with a love of learning and want to share that joy with others. Some are incredibly patient and disciplined and have the ability to teach skills far beyond the classroom material.

Still others overflow with creativity that is used to engage every student in exciting hands-on activities that foster lifelong learning. "It is not uncommon for my students to be singing, chanting, dancing, sketching, building, or doing whatever needs to be done in order to learn," shares Bethany Lopez, an ESOL teacher at Franz Elementary. "It's been amazing to witness my students' struggles, accomplishments, and growth."

Impacting Students

Teachers dedicate their lives to living outside of themselves, to pouring their hearts into children, to inspiring dreams to become reality, and to equipping our children with skills to succeed both in and out of the classroom. "It is such an amazing gift to have the ability to impact someone's life on a daily basis," shares Courtney Plank, second-grade teacher at Hayes Elementary. "As teachers we spend more time with our students during the week than we do with our own family. This is a huge responsibility and one that should be handled with great care."

How special, then, that a large number of teachers in Katy ISD are products of the same school district - in many cases the same school - they currently serve in?

From Student to Teacher

Kristi Kuzma, an Algebra II teacher, recognizes the value of teaching in the same district where she grew up. Attending Pattison Elementary, Beck Junior High, and Taylor High School, she now teaches high school math in the same hallways where she once attended. "As a student and athlete I got to know some great teachers and coaches along the way," says Kuzma. "They inspired me to pursue a teaching career, and my hope is that one day I can inspire my students to reach their goals as well."

A Family Affair

For another graduate of Taylor, Jennifer Isola, a sixth-grade science teacher at Memorial Parkway Junior High, alma mater has become a family affair. "Katy ISD is a wonderful school district. I have seen it grow so much and have had so many memories," shares Isola. "I wanted my own children to have that as well."

Not only did Isola and her husband Danny graduate from Taylor, but their legacy is continuing as their son Drake graduated in 2012 and their younger son Tanner will be attending in the coming years.

More than a Job

With so many born-and-raised Katyites teaching in our schools, it's no wonder Katy ISD ranks as one of the top largest school districts in the state. Teachers truly understand that this is much more than a job; they recognize it as a calling. "My impact as a teacher goes way beyond education in the classroom," states Rachel Banister, a sixth-grade Theater Arts teacher at WoodCreek Junior High. "I have learned that our students deal with so many different issues, and it is important to always make them feel safe and cared for. I can truly help shape my students into the adults they become and because of that, I haven't looked back."

Educational Mentors

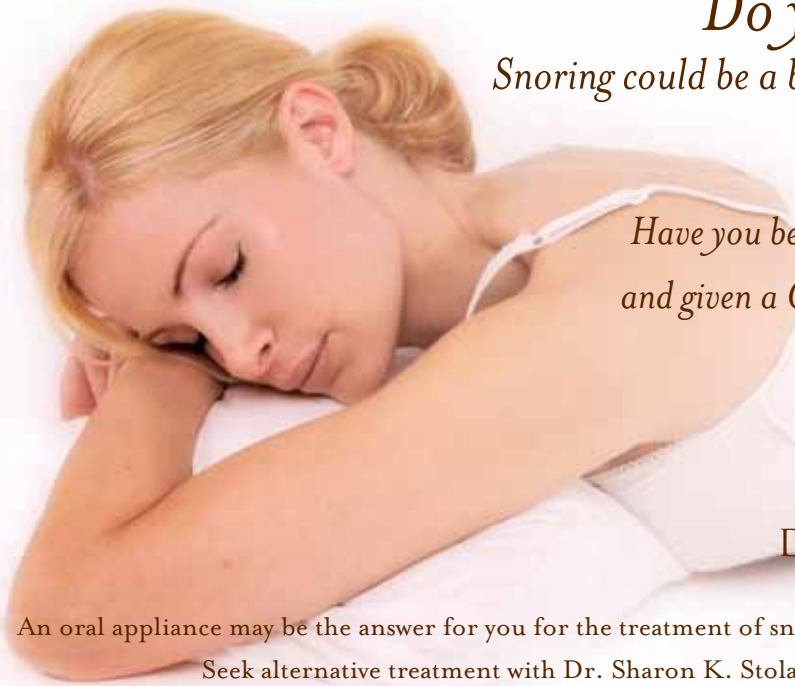
One thing is clear with every teacher encountered: They have all had one or more teachers mentor them along their educational path that encouraged their growth and fostered their confidence. "My love for science grew in college

Bethany Lopez enjoyed her Language Arts classes growing up. She attended Katy Elementary, Katy Junior High, and Katy High School.





Rachel Banister's favorite subject growing up was English. She attended Bear Creek Elementary, Mayde Creek Junior High, and Mayde Creek High School.



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Kayce Melody enjoyed Geometry in school. She attended Williamsburg Settlement Elementary, later renamed Diane Winborn Elementary, McDonald Junior High, and Katy High School.



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Jennifer Isola's favorite subjects were English and Science. She attended Mayde Creek Junior High and Taylor High School.

do and whom they serve makes them truly exceptional in every way. Their love extends far beyond the classroom and attempts to reach the heart of every child. "It's the best job in the world," says Banister. "Your hard work and effort almost always pay off." KM



KENZIE STANFIELD is a freelance writer for Katy Magazine and is married to her high school sweetheart. They have four children and love life in Katy.

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- Courtney Plank, Hayes Elementary



Kristi Kuzma loved Physical Education when in school. She attended Pattison Elementary, Beck Junior High, and Taylor High School.

when one of my science professors really presented the information in a fascinating way, and I wanted to do that for others," says Beckendorff Junior High's sixth-grade teacher Kayce Melody. "Then I completed my student teaching at Beckendorff Junior High, and my mentor teacher, Mindy Smith, was so encouraging."

Tradition of Excellence

It's clear that teachers who grew up in Katy have a rich tradition of excellence that they strive to pass on to the students in their classes. Maybe it's for that reason that so many Katy teachers have never given much thought to serving outside of the district. "Growing up here in Katy, I never had the desire to leave. I feel that we have some of the best schools in the state, and I knew I wanted to be a part of that powerhouse," asserts Melody. "There was never a question in my mind about where I would begin my teaching career. I knew it would be in Katy ISD," Lopez agrees.

The Heart of a Child

Where we come from often determines where we are going, and in the case of these teachers, it is somewhere fabulous. The love these teachers express for what they