

Inspiring Educators

Local educators share how their life journeys led them to Katy ISD and how motivating students fuels their passion and purpose

Written by Kennan Buckner | Photography by Sara Isola

Fexley Elementary teacher Ellen Adams wants her students to love the process of learning. She is committed to ensuring just that. She records instructional videos and posts them to emodo.com, where parents and students alike can collaborate in the learning process. “I have the kids record a podcast each week, and post it [online] so that their parents can hear them share about their week,” Adams explains. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. The technology tools Adams uses is her way of “creating a classroom learning community without walls.”

Joining the Community

While her objective is to teach, Adams’ ultimate goal is to ensure her students learn how to live respectfully and lovingly in their community.

Adams and her family planted their roots in Katy almost 10 years ago. “We moved [to Katy] so that our children would have the small town sense of community that I had while growing up.” She says, more than anything else, becoming a mother had a pivotal impact on her profession because she can empathize with her students’ parents. Adams shares, “I tell parents all the time, ‘I totally understand. My son or daughter did that, too.’”

When Music Becomes A Career

When Justin Bair was a kid, he wasn’t sure what he wanted to be when he grew up. Bair later realized his passion for music could translate into a career with a long-lasting impact. “I love teaching as much as I love learning,” he says. Perhaps his “nerdy side,” marked by a love of *Star Wars* and *Jeopardy* episodes, pairs well with this choir director at West Memorial Junior High.

Bair, the winner of the outstanding first-year teacher award, brings his quirks to the classroom and admits, “I love random facts. In fact, I give out Jolly Ranchers to any student who can tell me a fun fact I’ve never heard.”

Entertaining Students into Education

In addition, Bair uses technology and entertains today’s tech-savvy junior-highers into learning “because it’s fun, it’s competitive, and it’s motivating.” He shows music videos and follows it with class discussion time or has students write descriptions of how the music made them feel. The videos demonstrate music’s wide scope – and include technology, like the laser harp, the psychology of music therapy, or even music prodigies.

“Music and the arts help students to get in touch with their souls, with their person,” Bair says. “The music itself shapes and molds the whole person.”

He believes Katy ISD is famous for many reasons – beyond its sports and academia. “It’s an honor to even be included in the name of Katy,” Bair remarks. “As a first-year teacher, I couldn’t have asked for a better place to begin.”

Extra Special Education

Debbie Dockum of Katy High School was named the special education teacher of the year by Gulf Coast Association of Special Educators. If teachers wore their hearts on their sleeves, Dockum’s would say “Special needs children are exceptional.” She loves to watch her students as they mature from being shy freshmen, to seniors – ready to graduate. Her inspiration for being a special educator came from her aunt, also a teacher, who was born with only one full arm. “She didn’t allow anything to stand in her way,” Dockum says. And with that same spirit of determination, Dockum inspires others in her Katy classroom.

In a recent pilot program, she learned sign language to further help hearing impaired students. In addition, the group began using assistive technology – to better communicate between teachers and special needs students. “It’s amazing to watch a student’s face light up with a smile when they actually can hear what is being said or asked,” she says. The students then respond through sign language or with the help of a specially programmed iPod. The device acts like a modified cell phone allowing the hearing impaired to communicate through pictures and icons.

At Home in Katy

Katy pride is known far and wide across Texas and beyond. This Iowa-native knew she wanted to be part of the community when she first visited. “Katy ISD is one of the best school districts in Texas, and I consider it the best in the nation,” she says with pride. “I feel honored to be part of the Katy High School body.”

Dockum daily finds reasons to smile and has snapped “Kodak moments” in her memory. “Every day and year as a special education teacher is a defining moment and new adventure.”

A True Calling

Woodcreek Elementary principal Ronald “Ronnie” Mosher probably would not have been chosen “most likely to



Ellen Adams

Exley Elementary

“My ultimate success is if I teach my students how to interact respectfully and function lovingly in a learning community.”



Justin Bair

West Memorial Junior High

“Music and arts help students to get in touch with their souls. Music itself shapes and molds us into a whole person.”



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- Justin Bair, West Memorial Junior High choir director

succeed" in his early years. He admits he didn't think he would live past the age of 21 and people often judged him as lazy or unmotivated. Mosher's parents divorced, and he began experimenting with drugs. In desperation, his mother moved him into a different school, hoping that new friends and a new start would mean a better future. At Crosby High School his science teacher, Mr. Powers, took notice of Mosher.

"In class, I remember for the first time, truly thinking about things," Mosher shares. "He made a profound impact on me." One evening when arguing with his girlfriend about God, her parents asked Mosher to come to their house. When he arrived, it turned out to be an "intervention" of sorts – as his assistant principal was even there. A long conversation followed, and Mosher says it was then he made a decision that changed his life. "It took someone else to intervene in my life to show me that life could be so much more than what I was doing."

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Ronald Mosher

Woodcreek Elementary

“Students must know that they are first loved very deeply by their teachers and family. Love changes people and makes them better. It is what changed me and my life.”



Debbie Dockum

Katy High School

“To watch students blossom from the time they come in as freshmen, until the time they leave, is an unbelievable reward.”

Making a Career of Compassionate Care

After graduating high school at age 20, Mosher was the first in his family to attend college. For him being an educator is more than a paycheck or a career. “In short, I feel it is a calling. It is simply more than a job,” he says.

Mosher’s background helps fuel his passion for his profession. “As a result, I have so much more compassion for kids. I want to glorify God. I want to change the world.”

Even now, Mosher considers himself a teacher first and sees the importance of everyday opportunities. “Bottom line, changing the world does not happen in one huge event. It is a series of seemingly small events that happen in the context of relationships,” he smiles. “Make no doubt, we are impacting the world and our future through relationships and the kids we work with every day.” **KM**



KENNAN BUCKNER still smiles when she remembers the support and passion of her second-grade teacher Mrs. Malone who imparted to her the love of reading.

“We are impacting the world and our future through relationships and the kids we work with every day.”

- Ronald Mosher, Woodcreek Elementary principal