

Karen Sparks is a strategic reading teacher at Morton Ranch High School. She was named Teacher of the Year 2014 and has volunteered to help students who have dropped out to study and get their GED.

"I want to teach students how to overcome limitations, hardships, prejudice, and mindsets that keep them from reaching their goals. I want our students to be given the same dignity and respect that others are given. I love my job."

—Karen Sparks, Morton Ranch High School

Karen Sparks

TEACHING WITH ENCOURAGEMENT

Using love and positivity, Karen Sparks brings out the best in her students and encourages them to never give up

Written by Shetye Cypher | Photography by Edward Heard



Karen Sparks (middle) with students (left to right) Christopher Suarez, Jonathan Martinez, Zoha Wazir, Natalia Mueller, and Ashley Vasquez

Karen Sparks shows up at Morton Ranch High School (MRHS) full of warmth and energy to take on her day. Having taught for six years, she is helping to pilot a new program, strategic reading, on her campus. Every year, the students write love and appreciation notes to Sparks on butterfly templates that she keeps around her classroom. Sparks is truly making a life-changing impact on her students. Becoming a teacher was something she says she did not choose, it chose her. "It's a mission more than a job," she says.

Teaching with Positivity

Student Leonrea Poindexter describes Sparks' classroom similar to that of coming home. "She treats us as if we are her own kids." Sparks loves them and spreads the passion she has for teaching by instilling positivity into her students. "When she is teaching us or talking with us you can tell she does

not see her students as failures, as others saw, or as we see in ourselves. She turns every negative thought into something positive," says Poindexter. Sparks has inspired Poindexter to be a leader and help others. "I see myself as someone who can cheer others on because Ms. Sparks was that for me. Just being a positive person can be so much for someone."

Seeing the Very Best

Sparks inspired former student Crystal Gutierrez from her freshman year until she graduated high school by teaching to the beat of her own drum. "She always tries to make learning simpler and teaches in a way that the whole class will enjoy and understand," says Gutierrez. Sparks inspires, believes in, and brings the best out of her students. "She has always motivated me to do better, and not to give up again like I once did." By caring for her students she has guided them on the path to success. "She believed in me when I didn't and

saw potential,” says Gutierrez. Sparks is always there to listen and help her students without judgment.

Being Their Guide

MRHS junior Daniela Romo says Sparks uses unique teaching methods and does not let them give up. “Ms. Sparks impacted my life with her positive attitude; she’s been my guide since I met her. I used to hate to read but now thanks to her, reading is my favorite class,” says Romo. Rewarding moments come plenty for a teacher that inspires and Sparks has her share, including “teaching students who defy the odds.”

Sparks cares deeply for the students that she is able to mentor and sees the greatness in each of them. “I hope they know that they are loved and their life matters. They are not the circumstance, labels, grades, or judgments placed upon them. I hope they learn that for every person who tries to cause them harm, there are a million more who want to do them good,” says Sparks. She believes that Katy has an amazing opportunity to be a part of something big and she knows that by being a teacher she can impact lives. She certainly has taken advantage of that. “Each and every student needs validation simply for being a child in our community and every human being needs love and affirmation. We can be that one special person in their lives who makes that difference.” KM



SHETYE CYPHER is a freelance writer who is also the journalism teacher and publications adviser at Tompkins High School.



Sparks FUN FACTS

- Two of her kids are Eagle Scouts and one is a Gold Award recipient
- She is in the hall of fame for basketball
- In her home city of Erie, PA she was chosen as one of the top 50 athletes of the century
- She loves to dance and sing but would never be caught in public doing so
- She’s an excellent public speaker
- Bubble tea is one of her favorite beverages

Is there a Katy ISD teacher that changed your life, or do you know a teacher that has greatly impacted many? Tell us about them! editor@katymagazine.com

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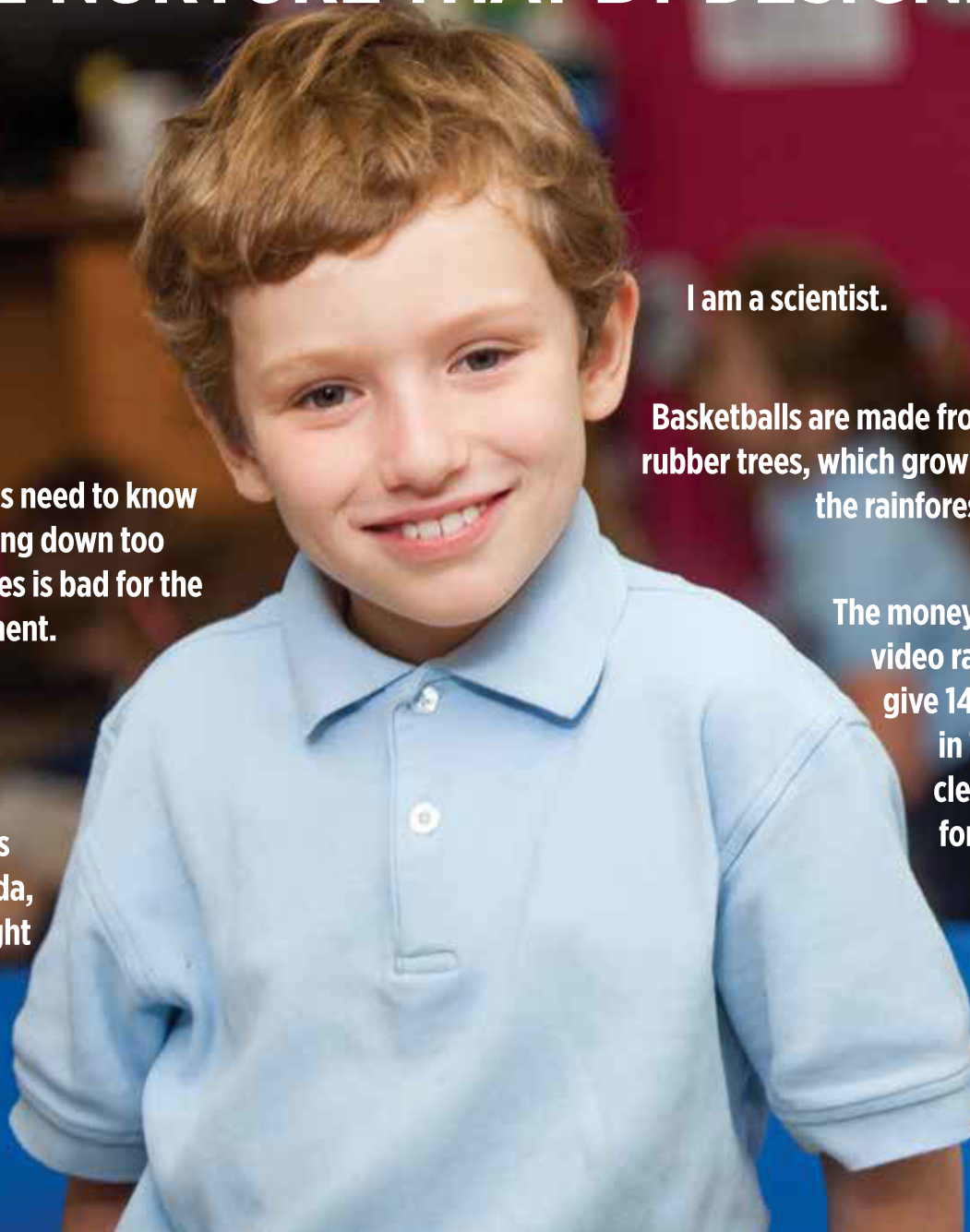
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