

A Katy Magazine feature highlighting the hard work of Katy ISD principals

Principal Kristin Harper

Randolph Elementary School's principal is demonstrating a passion for education and excellence



Written by Kirsten Cornell | Photography by Layla Zakaria

Kristin Harper always aspired to be a teacher. Armed with her easel and chalkboard as a young girl, she seated all of her stuffed animals in rows for their daily lesson. “I absolutely loved being a classroom teacher and making a direct impact on children,” says Harper. “I never thought I wanted to be a principal until I held a leadership role on my campus and began working to help teachers improve instruction.”

After holding that position, she began to realize that she could impact more children by leading a campus and ensuring all students were receiving the best possible educational experiences.

Expectation of Excellence

Harper began her career in Alief ISD as a teacher, then a language arts specialist, and finally an assistant principal for 14 years. She made her way to Katy ISD as an assistant principal at Cimarron Elementary in 2007, and was named the principal of Alexander Elementary in 2008, a position that she held for six years.

On her last day as principal at Alexander Elementary, they surprised her with a “principal clap out.” The entire school came out into the hallways and out by the portable buildings where they had Harper walk by as they

“clapped her out” to her new school. “They were cheering and high-fiving me. I could barely make it through the whole school because I was so overcome with emotion,” Harper recalls. “They also had the school choir sing a special song to the tune of ‘You’ve Got a Friend in Me’ with personalized lyrics. I was completely overwhelmed and definitely doing the ‘ugly cry.’”

When Katy ISD decided to open Elementary School #37 in 2014, which is now James Randolph Elementary (JRE), the district reached out to Harper and appointed her the campus principal. “Having worked in another district



Principal Kristin Harper pictured with kindergarten through fifth-grade students in Randolph Elementary's library

for a long time, I really appreciate the sense of community here in Katy ISD," says Harper. "It feels like a group effort to educate every child in Katy and everyone takes that job seriously."

Harper is also impressed by the immense amount of parental support. "When I first came to Katy, I also noticed the extreme amount of school and district spirit. Everyone is proud to be a part of the excellence that has become an expectation here," she adds.

Amazing Staff

Being the inaugural principal at JRE, Harper had the unique opportunity of having a hand in many of the school's initial stages. "I was extremely fortunate to hire every single person who works at Randolph and built an incredible team who has made this school the amazing place it is," says Harper. "We want to make sure we establish a place where children feel loved and respected, and that all of our decisions are based on what is best for our students. We also want to make sure we are constantly meeting children where they are, while at the same time challenging them to reach their full potential by providing rigorous learning experiences."

Harper feels very fortunate that Superintendent Alton Frailey trusted her to open a new school. "It was a big responsibility and a lot of work that I did not take lightly, but I could not have done it without the support of many departments in the district and the amazing staff that I was able to handpick," she adds.

Genuine Character

She believes that one of the most important traits of a successful principal is that they are relational. "As a building principal, you interact with hundreds of people on any given day. It is extremely important that people know they can trust you, that you are honest, and have nothing but the best intentions for the children in your school," she says. "People need to know that you genuinely care about them and that you want nothing but the best for all stakeholders. The way you treat people says a lot about your character." She also believes that people follow those who they know well and can trust to get the job done.

"My absolute favorite aspect of my job is interacting with the kids! I look forward to greeting their smiling faces, visiting classrooms, and interacting with them in the hallways," adds Harper. "I enjoy going to special events, interacting with them, and getting to know them better." Their hugs and smiles are what keeps Harper going and inspires her to continue to want the best for each of them.

Passion for Education

Her advice for future educators is to make sure teaching is their passion, not just a job or career. "Those who are most successful as educators have a real passion that is evident in the way they teach and interact with their children," says Harper. In addition, she advises that teachers should treat every child as if they were their own and make every decision based on what is best for the students.

The staff at JRE would love for the community to know that they work extremely hard on a daily basis, but also make learning fun, interactive, and provide opportunities for students to be well-rounded individuals who are respectful and kind. Harper adds, "We welcome visitors because we are so proud of the culture we have created here." **KM**

KIRSTEN CORNELL is the lead associate editor at Katy Magazine. Randolph Elementary's motto is her new life mantra.



James Randolph Elementary

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