



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Robyn Sewell-Poutra is surrounded by some of her favorite Travis Elementary School Tigers.

Travis teacher earns prestigious Goldin award

As the Title 1 Mathematics Peer Facilitator, it is Robyn Sewell-Poutra's leadership that propels students' math scores at Travis Elementary School in Goose Creek CISD into high levels of achievement.

For that leadership, Robyn recently earned recognition from the Goldin Foundation for "Excellence in Education." She joins distinguished educators in California, Massachusetts, and Texas who since 1991 have been recognized by the Foundation for making outstanding contributions in their schools and communities. Previous Goose Creek CISD winners include Bobbie Becka of Travis in 2005 and Nova Stoppel of Austin in 2006.

"Robyn's determination and passion to help others goes beyond academics – it's about being the best person one can be," her award nominators wrote.

Harriet Goldin, the president and founder of the Goldin Foundation, said educators play a vital role in society in supporting young people's growth and preparing them to be adaptable, flexible, creative, and responsive to future societal changes. "Our goals are to foster the respect for and appreciation of educators, seek the retention of outstanding educators, and attract dynamic, intelligent, and creative future educators," she said.

Robyn's story

On any given morning you will find Robyn, with a big smile, greeting Travis students by name, or a nickname she has given the child, while consistently reinforcing school safety through "PawWay" behavior and district dress code.

Her determination and passion to help others goes beyond academics – it's about being the best person one can be. This character trait has been instilled in her since childhood when a great-grandmother said, "Whatever you do even if it is making a pan of biscuits, make it the best pan of biscuits you can make." Robyn models this every day, every hour, with every task.

Robyn is notorious for "crunching numbers" with every bit of data. She noticed that while the passing rate for math was increasing, the problem-solving objective was not gaining ground. Hence, she developed what she calls "SC?PLAN."

This cognitive process through high order thinking improved the problem solving strand 100 percent over three years. Each child learns the process of thinking using a variety of skills to solve any problem. Robyn put in place a scaffolding approach with specific criteria at each grade level providing success for all cognitive abilities.

Her colleagues say the excitement in Robyn's voice while she is teaching quickly transfers to even the students who display the greatest amount of reluctance that encourages them to willingly strive to find the solution.

Under her parents' tutelage growing up in a family of four in Baytown, Sewell learned about hard work, dedication, and determination. She attended the Goose Creek schools and quickly found out what leadership was all about as head twirler in junior high.

High school provided Robyn with many opportunities to serve others and acquire additional leadership skills while participating in Future Teachers of America, Kiwanis service organization, captain of the twirling line as well as teamwork on the drill team. While in college, Robyn pursued a business career but always felt something missing in her life: she knew in her heart she wanted to be a teacher. Robyn began teaching in Goose Creek CISD after graduation as a long-term substitute in physical education.

Beginning her career teaching math and science proved the most difficult challenge of Robyn's life. Math was not her strongest subject. She attended as many workshops as possible in math and science even earning a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction specializing in math.

Today, the thrill of a student "getting it" makes Robyn's eyes glow, her fellow teachers say. Many times, she leads a Congo line down the hallway with proud struggling students who have achieved long overdue success, giving them the opportunity to bask in the much deserved glory.

In October 2000, Robyn learned she had breast cancer. She handled this terrible news with determination and grace. She had 12 surgeries and six months of chemotherapy. She never missed a day of teaching; even presented a school-wide Cinco de Mayo program the day after three-hour chemo treatment. When her hair fell out, she chose not to wear wigs, but used her balding appearance as a model for her students to learn that the inward appearance is more important than the outward appearance.

Robyn uses this "little adventure" as a tool when talking with her students because the children learn that she, too, has had hardships and she truly understands how they feel.

Robyn's job description changes on a daily basis. She "crunches" the numbers; tutors students; assists teachers with math needs, maintains consistency with student behavior in the hallway and dress code; acts as a mentor to many students and teachers; gains the trust and respect of students and teachers through consistency for following the expectations set forth; trains teachers on the latest technology software and even finds the time to do something special for the teachers in her hallway on their birthday.

Robyn takes every child where he/she is at that moment and builds a relationship so he/she feels comfortable; hence, learning takes place. Once trust is established and, the child feels at ease sharing what he/she knows or doesn't know academically, Sewell can help that child overcome any mathematic struggle present. Whether a game of cards as a warm-up or math TAKS practice, the children know they are to give 110 percent because that is all Robyn expects in return after all, "Whatever you do even if it is making a pan of biscuits, make it the best pan of biscuits you can make."

Teaching in the fast lane

Helping children extends beyond the classroom and into junior drag racing for children ages 6 to 17. Robyn traveled to California to assist in the groundbreaking program for children to learn about racing; its mathematical application, sportsmanship, responsibility, and teamwork. She worked with Community in Schools and the after school Gang Activities Program providing disadvantaged students opportunities to earn college scholarship money.

Robyn and her husband, Steve, sponsor five youths, his own "ride," and all that is asked in return is for him to do his best. Robyn's husband maintains the dragsters while she focuses on the child. Four out of the five boys who have participated have gone on to college while one earned college credits and is now in the Army. This year begins her 16th season of being involved in junior drag racing, and she will have five children ranging in age from 8 to 16 competing this year.

At the end of the day, Sewell keeps in mind this quote by Audrey Hepburn, "A quality education has the power to transform societies in a single generation, provide children with the protection they need from the hazards of poverty, labor exploitation and disease, and give them the knowledge, skills, and confidence to reach their full potential."

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