

Enriching kids' lives



As a teacher mentor, Georgia Sparks (middle) is mentoring new teachers. She is a third-grade educator at Level Cross Elementary School and also oversees all the teacher mentors. LEVEL CROSS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Randolph County teacher has positive influence on children

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Georgia Sparks, a third-grade teacher at Level Cross Elementary School, truly has a heart for children. As the lead teacher mentor at the school, she is devoted to making a positive impact in students' lives.

Sparks initially began working at Level Cross as a volunteer in the classroom when her son was in kindergarten. After volunteering a couple of years, she accepted a position as a teacher assistant (TA) in Primary-1, a grade between kindergarten and first. Sparks enjoyed

the teaching duties she performed as a TA and decided to pursue a degree in business administration and become an educator.

At present she has been teaching at Level Cross for 11 years and hasn't looked back. "(The role of a teacher) just feels like home to me," she said.

An educator's dedication to helping children succeed

Sparks finds that teaching itself isn't hard, but the other expectations an educator has can make it tough. Educators do a lot of things outside of the classroom hours including professional de-

velopment, serving on committees and more.

Balancing your duties with the class, parents and the community can be tough. It's hard when you're doing all you can but you don't feel like it's enough to help each student succeed, especially when you hear the negativity towards teachers. But Sparks says you just have to keep doing your best.

Sparks knows the importance of continual learning for a teacher. She has taken several courses and wants to keep learning. "The way kids learn is evolving, so we (teachers) have to

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evolve too,” said Sparks.

With all the expectations that go along with teaching, there never seems to be enough time to get everything done. “It’s not just walking into the classroom at 7:30 a.m. and teach and go home at 3 p.m. It doesn’t work that way,” she said.

Sparks says she struggles to keep a good balance between work and her home life. She’s normally at school at 6:30 a.m. to make sure she’s prepared for the day before the kids come. Although she has been there as late as 6:30 p.m., she now has a goal to leave by 5 p.m. unless something has to be done that day.

Teaching the required content, she has to adjust to different abilities and ways of learning. Individualized instruction, small-group work and hands-on activities and games help kids learn at their own level, in their own way.

Her students are on her mind well beyond school hours. She thinks about what she can do better to help each child. “Sometimes I wake up at 2 o’clock in the morning still thinking,” she said.

Being pulled out of school during the COVID pandemic affected kids’ education. Hotspots were given out for those without internet, but some kids didn’t have the support at home to access their lessons on the computer. Even those who adjusted to virtual education didn’t have the benefit of one-on-one instruction. After kids returned to school, Sparks says educators were trying to get kids caught up while teaching them the required content for their grade level.

While out of school, children also didn’t get to develop their social skills by interacting with their classmates.

Sparks says part of teaching is figuring out how to meet each child’s needs so they can succeed. She has even purchased shoes for disadvantaged kids. During the time of virtual education, Sparks worried about the school’s disadvantaged kids getting regular meals while staying at home.

Kids’ needs include their social and emotional well-being. Last year, Sparks had a student in a wheelchair. His disability was accommodated in the classroom, but it bothered Sparks that he wasn’t able to play with other kids outside. School staff worked together and



Third-grade educator Georgia Sparks does a reading lesson with her students. She has been teaching at Level Cross Elementary School for over 11 years. KENDRA JOHNSON, LEVEL CROSS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

got a little basketball goal and other things he could play with in his wheelchair. Other kids then played with him, making him feel more like one of them.

Sparks did an after-school sports club prior to COVID and she hopes they’ll get to do it again this year. This gives children experience in athletics who otherwise may not have the opportunity. They get to be active while learning about various sports.

Sparks advocates for the kids in her classroom. She wants her students to know that she’s there for them if they

ever need someone to talk to, even years down the road. Previous students have come to her from fifth grade, high school and even college, some of them now parents of kids in her class.

Knowing that she’s making a difference in the kids’ lives is what motivates her. She likes to see their excitement when they’ve achieved a learning goal in reading or math. Seeing each kid learn and grow, form friendships with their peers and develop a bond with her is rewarding. It makes her happy when they come back years later and let her know



Third-grade teacher Georgia Sparks works with a small group of students in math. She has been a teacher at Level Cross Elementary School for over 11 years. KENDRA JOHNSON, LEVEL CROSS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

they’ve achieved a goal like graduating from high school.

“The kids are what make it all worthwhile,” she said.

For the past couple of years, Sparks has been mentoring new teachers at Level Cross. Sparks says new teachers are required to have an experienced educator to mentor them. A mentor uses their experience to guide and support the new teacher. She remembers how helpful it was to have a mentor when she was a new teacher. So when she was asked to be a mentor, she was more than willing to be that support to someone else.

She has been the lead teacher mentor since last year and is ready to help whenever she can. While still a mentor herself, as the leader she has to ensure that the new teachers’ needs are being met and that the mentors are doing what they should.

Sparks plans to continue helping children succeed until she retires, and she feels it would be hard then to leave her role as a teacher. “I’m not sure that I won’t volunteer afterwards because I think I’ll miss it,” she said.

Amy Dunn writes people profiles. Know someone in Randolph County who is making an impact or has an interesting story? Email suggestions to adunn@courier-tribune.com.