

GCS's Karen Alexander awarded Teacher of the Month

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Alexander teaches to the student, not the test

Karen Alexander, a seventh to twelfth-grade teacher at Gallup Christian School, is Camille's Sidewalk Cafe's Teacher of the Month for April. Hailing from Weatherford, Okla., Alexander made her way to Gallup with her family and brought along her passion for teaching. She admitted to being surprised by the Teacher of the Month nomination and felt proud to see her hard work recognized by the community.

"I was a little bit shocked, I didn't know of this program," Alexander said. "I was like, 'what, I was chosen out of all the teachers in Gallup!' I've since learned how it works, that people can go in and nominate their favorite teacher and why. I was very honored."

After graduating from Southwestern Oklahoma State University with a degree in education, Alexander began a teaching career in her home state in 1978. After 10 years of teaching, she found herself in a new role, as a stay-at-home mom to three young boys. Alexander and her family eventually relocated to Gallup, where her husband found a job working at the Manuelito Children's Home.

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Around that same time, Gallup Christian School was in need of a teacher—and Alexander was asked to help fill in, steering her back onto the teaching track.

She worked with the school for two years, before deciding to open up a school of her own. She ran the Alexander Christian Academy, which primarily taught high school students, for the next three years.

"I found (running my own school) to be challenging but fun and later on in 2001, I merged right (back) into the Gallup Christian School and have been here ever since," she said.

Gallup Christian School is a private institution, and because of that Alexander finds it offers advantages to teachers that other Gallup-McKinley County schools don't offer. One big advantage, she said, is that she doesn't have to "teach to the test," as many public school teachers are required to. Instead, she is given room to tailor her instruction based on individual students' needs.

"To be honest with you, I don't like the common core, I don't like teaching a test," Alexander said. "I like to teach students, and I want them to have the best education they can have. Not to tell the students 'here is what you need to pass the test.' I would rather work with them individually, that's the main reason I'm out here."

Bible-based curriculum

Teaching within a Christian-education atmosphere is a big plus, Alexander said, as it allows her the freedom to give her opinions on touchy subjects, which is not the case in most public schools.

"Although I loved teaching public schools, I was limited in what I could do," Alexander said. "I enjoy the fact that we say the Pledge (of Allegiance) every day and we have prayer every day. We sing Christians songs, devotions, and all the material is from a Bible background."

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Another plus, Alexander said, is getting to teach her students at their own pace. Alexander said she teaches a class of 20 kids, and they don't all learn at the same rate. Without the benefit of individualized instruction, some students are held back, gifted students grow bored, and many others are overlooked, too, Alexander explained.

"Now this way, they take their time and do their books and when they are ready for a test they take a test," Alexander said of her more personalized teaching method. "The students set their own test (dates) and decide when they are ready."

Even within her attentive atmosphere, Alexander still faces challenges when it comes to students who have trouble focusing, or getting into the classroom mindset.

"Some come from a background that didn't encourage education, and you've got to want them to learn," she said. "I try to do everything I can: I'll joke with them, I'll sit and talk with them—even pray with them. Whatever they need, I'll try to be there for them."

When asked what advice she could give to those wanting to be a teacher, Alexander took a few moments to think.

"I would encourage them to make sure that they do love children, that they do love education, and that this is something they will enjoy doing every day," Alexander said. "Because if you don't enjoy doing that, then do something else."

For more information on Gallup Christian School, contact (505) 722-2007. For Manuelito Children's Home, contact (505) 863-5530.

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