

Local educator values the community she hails from

Written by By Shepherd Waldenberger Sun Correspondent
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Teacher of the Month: Monique Martinez

Monique Martinez, a first grade teacher at Juan de Oñate Elementary School, was selected as the 'Teacher of the Month' for February. Martinez describes herself as a "born and raised Gallup girl," and has been teaching for 11 years.

All 11 of those years have been spent at Juan de Oñate Elementary with first graders, and she sees no reason to change course. Martinez left Gallup briefly to earn her teaching degree at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales before returning home to teach in her community. Her parents have always been Sunday school teachers, and she began helping them out at a young age.

"We have a lot of educators in my family," she said.

This family influence, along with exposure to admirable teachers during her school years, led Martinez to pursue a career in education.

"I had really awesome teachers growing up," she said.

The kids are what motivate Martinez to keep coming back to school every morning. On her choice of teaching first grade, she said "I like this age, because they still get excited about learning things."

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Also, “they love to share.” This enthusiasm for knowledge and teamwork was evident as Martinez’s students passed out red and green clay and began to mix them to create three-dimensional diagrams of earthworms on March 9.

Smiles and squeals of delight filled the room while the children shared techniques and shaped their models.

Martinez is trying out a new testing strategy that involves creative methods and student choice in how she evaluates her class’s understanding of material. Earthworms are the current topic.

While most of the class elected to work with clay to create earthworms and label their parts, a few students chose different routes to show off their knowledge. These included a poster, an informational pamphlet, and an electronic presentation on the computer. Martinez says “the hands-on activities give me a better idea of what they know” as compared to a conventional multiple choice assessment.

Principal Kristen Bischoff admires Martinez’s approach and says that “she’s able to speak to every learner in her classroom.”

Martinez acknowledges that Gallup “has many difficulties,” and she strives to open her students’ minds to a larger world.

She tells her students they can be anything they want, and uses field trips to expand their knowledge of opportunity. “I always encourage them to do what they love and always do their best,” she said.

Martinez acknowledges that her students are not the only ones learning either. There are two other first grade teachers, and Martinez said, “we work super close together and learn so much from each other.”

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She also noted that “there are so many wonderful teachers in this community,” and she wishes they could all receive awards for the work.

Bischoff feels that Martinez is well-deserving of her “Teacher of the Month” accolade and said that “she’s smart, she’s diligent, and she’s just an all around amazing person.”

When asked about his favorite part of the first grade, Axion, 7, responded “when they do their homework.”

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