

When I entered the University of Central Arkansas in 1987, I knew exactly what I wanted to do: coach volleyball and prepare myself for a career in education. Because I am a driven and decisive person, I never changed my major from education, and landed my first head coaching job in 1994 at Denton High after just two years of teaching. My philosophy of teaching has changed dramatically through the years, budding from a relentless ambition to build a championship volleyball team at DHS in the mid '90s. However in the past ten years, personal trials and triumphs in both my personal and professional career have altered this philosophy and the person I am today.

Freshmen are my favorite to teach. I embrace their curiosities in my subject and the joy I get from calming their inquiries, always keeping in mind that subject concepts like latitude and longitude are tantamount to the students' social consciences and responsibilities. I stress personal courteousness and manners that are essential to co-existing with classmates and teachers. I also make it a point to examine my students' roles beyond my classroom, including events like Homecoming, supporting athletics, dances, and other complimentary organizations into my everyday discussions. A term like "Lake Titicaca" is sure to elicit a class-wide giggle year after year, but I am also proud to see my student's maturity by graduation. I introduce Denton High as a fantastic place to be receiving an education while modeling enthusiasm for our school, which I feel makes me a dependable resource for those students transitioning to high school life. Similar to building a great volleyball program, developing strong academic students begins with a solid foundation that I make every effort to provide.

"Welcome to your favorite World Geography class. We're glad you are here." is the greeting my students hear at the beginning of each class, in fact this mantra is the theme of my bulletin board that sits in the front of my room. Humor and life stories are a part of my class, and I think those help my students relate to me and the points I make during lecture. Positive reinforcement historically is a powerful tool to shape student behavior, and one I have always used. It was not until my 7-year-old son, Kyle, was diagnosed with Autism in 2003 that I learned to

maximize this tool as it became a daily part of the therapy he needed to learn make his wants and needs known to us in an acceptable manner. Kyle deserves much credit for my current feelings about teaching, the patience and compassion I have gained, and my renewed charge to be the very best teacher I can be because “*every child counts*”. A rather simple and obvious statement, it truly has a clearer meaning to me now. Somebody’s most precious child is sitting in my room, depending on me. I hope my students develop into competitors in a global economy they understand one day, reaching their goals, knowing that the roots of that process can be traced back to a time I challenged and cared about them in my World Geography class.

Cleanliness might be my classroom’s trademark, but routine, organization and consistency are the key elements. Because teenagers embrace technology, I have created a web site that includes lesson plans, worksheets, Power Point notes, and interactive blogs. The data projector is a major part of my lectures, allowing me to teach note-taking skills, and to show the world through pictures. Although the Social Studies TAKS components are taught as a bell ringer activity daily, the English short answer response writing with political cartoons is something I have incorporated as a strategy to include writing across the curriculum, as requested from our administration. All of these techniques have received positive feedback from the students, their parents, and my fellow teachers.

The classroom is the basis of my job at Denton High, but the extra time and devotion spent in six years of coaching and more recently, six years of advising Student Council, has provided me the most precious rewards. My volleyball players have stayed connected with me through graduations, weddings, and babies. Student Council members have gone on to lead their universities in student government and in Greek life, and often I receive an e-mail when they win an election or pull off an amazing event. The theme at DHS this year is “building relationships”- something that has always been a focus for my classes, teams, and organizations, and for that I am honored to be an outstanding teacher nominee.