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**ON TARGET FOR
ADVENTURE!**

BANDERA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

BACK-TO-SCHOOL CONVOCATION

AUGUST 20, 2008

ON TARGET FOR ADVENTURE!

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OUR GOAL IS TO BE AN EXEMPLARY DISTRICT

KEVIN L. DYES, ED.D.

PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONES AS A COURTESY TO OUR SPEAKERS

Nika Maples, a native Texan, never thought she would become a teacher. By her sophomore year in college everything changed.

A massive stroke left Ms. Maples quadriplegic shortly after her 20th birthday. She could not speak or swallow. She could not even blink. Physicians warned her family that she had as little as 48 hours to live. If she lived at all, she could be expected to remain in an unresponsive state. She had lost all functionality and had no hope of recovery. Her mother refused to look into options for assisted living and urged her daughter to keep working toward rehabilitation, though she faced extreme discouragement.

Almost a year later, she walked back onto her college campus on her own two feet.

It became clearer by the day: Life is brief and brilliant. Whatever we choose to do with our handful of moments on earth, it is critical that we make those moments significant by serving others. She could think of no better way to serve than to educate today's youth.

After only five years of teaching high school English in public schools, Nika Maples had the remarkable honor of being named Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year 2007. She currently travels the state, speaking for school districts, organizations, and universities. She holds a BS in mass communications from Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth and will earn an MA in English education from Teachers College, Columbia University in 2010.

Her teaching philosophy is simple. Teachers, as academic physicians, must not remove "educational life support" from any student, no matter how seemingly hopeless the situation.

It is never too late to learn and it is never too late to teach.



Grant Simpson is the 2008 Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year. Simpson has taught fourth grade in the Keller and Crowley school districts for the past five years. A child of educators, he was always around schools and even as a child got to go inside the inner sanctum – the teacher's lounge.

But it was football that helped convince him to become a teacher. Once he made the varsity football squad in high school, he was eligible to coach in a local flag football league. He and a friend coached the same team for three years. "Watching kids learn something that I taught them was an incredible feeling that sparked my interest in the education profession."

He also went through an educational internship while in high school and worked with a fourth-grade teacher. **Although normally an introverted person, Simpson quickly felt at ease and comfortable in this classroom.** "What I understood immediately was that I had found my haven in a world that constantly freaks me out!"

Now he works to create a safe and supportive haven for his fourth-grade students. "One of my goals every year is to develop a family or community atmosphere in our room," he said. He creates a huge community calendar in which the students post their activities such as sports events, choir concerts, church events and more. "I make a promise to each one who brings a schedule that I will attend at least one of their functions." So he and his wife, who uses the same calendar concept in her third-grade class, can often be found roaming football fields, auditoriums and churches to watch their students perform. He takes a photo of himself and his student at these events and then posts it in the classroom. "It's an incredible feeling to see the pride in their eyes the next day when during our morning meeting they get to share how I came to their event," Simpson said.

It is important to Simpson to develop a "relationship-driven classroom. I felt that if I could connect with my students on a personal level, the chance they would want to come to school would improve." He said, "I will teach the required material in an intriguing way, all the while teaching my students how to think. I want them to be ready and eager for a lifetime of learning, not test taking.

I believe it was the late, great Dr. Seuss who said, 'You've learned the things you need to pass that test and many more – I'm certain you'll succeed. We've taught you that the earth is round, that red and white make pink, and something else that matters more – we've taught you how to THINK!'

