



Caring and Committed

Katelen Fikes – ‘It keeps me on my toes’

Common Core State Standards aren’t new to Katelen Fikes, they’re what the first-year teacher focused on in earning her credential.

She sees promise, flexibility and opportunity in emphasizing critical thinking, analysis and writing by students, and in teacher collaboration and data-driven instruction in which student-by-student test results help shape classroom priorities.

Fikes feels blessed to be teaching now, she said, because she can be creative in trying to make learning fun.

“I feel excited because we can take one standard and do so many projects with it,” she said.

In a lesson plan about bees, for example, after reading about the flying, honey-making insects, Fikes’ first-graders:

- Watched a video about bees, then compared and contrasted what they learned by reading vs. watching
- Wrote their own story about bees, which included pictures, labeling, and writing an opinion paragraph
- Answered math problems about bees, for example: If 20 bees are inside a beehive and 6 fly off, how many remain?
- Observed honey inside a honeycomb

Fikes and a teaching colleague, Heather Gohn, worked collaboratively in raising student achievement after analyzing results from Natomas Unified’s new assessments, known as NWEA. Students from their two first-grade classes were placed into groups for a math lesson on measurement. Fikes taught high achievers, while Gohn provided extra instruction to students needing it. Test scores later showed both groups benefited, Fikes said.

Principal Amreek Singh said Fikes is proactive, collaborates well, and cares very deeply about students. “She connects very well with the families of her kids. She also has the Vision right, that all kids will succeed, no matter what. She looks through that lens. She’ll do anything to help and support the kids in her classroom. She’s awesome.”

Fikes said she now teaches the grade that was pivotal in her own childhood: Entering the first grade, she could not read as well as her classmates, but a dynamic teacher inspired her, excited her about reading, and made her feel confident and smart. By the end of the year, Fikes wanted to be a teacher herself, she said.

"It doesn't feel like work to me," Fikes said of teaching.

"What I love about teaching is that it's constantly changing, so each day is different," she said. "Different experiences with different kids. I love that, it keeps me on my toes. It's not a behind-the-desk job. And my favorite part is seeing students get it, seeing (a lesson) click with them. Every time I see that happen with kids, I think back to when it happened with me in the first grade."