

HPCF 2019 Grant Awards Reception
Sara Sher

Thank you to the Highland Park Community Foundation for supporting teachers as we enter our 10th year for this award.

Patricia Castro, dual-language fifth grade teacher at Oak Terrace, has been selected as the HPCF's Golden Apple recipient for 2019. In her fifth grade dual-language classroom, all of the students are developing bilinguals. Her class demographics reflect that of the entire school, with a wide range of abilities and performances. They learn language arts, science, and math in Spanish with Patricia as their teacher, meaning she teaches two different classes of students - half in the morning and half in the afternoon. She has twice the number of students each day than a traditional elementary classroom teacher, which is an incredible challenge that she embraces with devotion, skill, and love.

Patricia treats each of her students with the same expectations and supports each of them to reach his or her full potential. In her magical and caring classroom community, she models and helps her students appreciate all of their similarities and differences, and her students understand that they learn in different ways, and all have various experiences, talents, strengths, needs, and interests. As one parent noted, Patricia was the first teacher who was able to create an atmosphere where **all** backgrounds were respected and valued.

Patricia finds inspiration from a well-known Stanford mathematics professor named Jo Boaler who in a TED talk, stated, "I'm here to tell you that what you have believed about your own potential has changed what you have learned and continues to do that, continues to change your learning, and your experiences."

It is apparent in Patricia's classroom how she embraces this philosophy by changing the way her students believe about their own potential. She fosters an environment where everyone arrives on day one on the same playing field, bringing his or her own ideas, strengths, needs, backgrounds, and knowledge to the classroom, and becoming a valuable member of their classroom family. There are no labels or preconceived notions in this classroom.

Her observation team noted: "Mrs. Castro demonstrates that education is more than just the curriculum. She sees the curriculum as the seed, but then she provides the sun, water, and nutrients in her modeling, questioning, and engagement that allows her students to grow into healthy, well-rounded, confident individuals."

Patricia Castro creates a community in her classroom that exemplifies the way our own community and the world should be. It is my distinct pleasure and honor to introduce an exemplary teacher: Mrs. Patricia Castro