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Lancaster ISD Belt Line Elementary Teacher Receives National Computer Science Award

Lancaster, TX/Lancaster ISD – Less than a year after starting an afterschool computer science club for students at Lancaster ISD's Belt Line Elementary Chanel White, the BLE Innovation Lab teacher was recognized by the Computer Science Teachers Association and Code.org as one of eight recipients of the 2018 Champions for Computer Science award at the national kickoff event in Seattle, Washington.

"I am very passionate about teaching computer science," White said. "I am passionate about helping students to understand that computer science isn't something inside a box, but is something they use every day, from how they brush their teeth to how they get up in the morning."

When she started the club last year, White was teaching mathematics on her campus and simply wanted to provide a new experience for the students. She had no idea that the student interest would grow so large and she would be asking her principal to create a computer science class for elementary students.

White said she wanted to start a computer science class to give students who may not otherwise get exposure to this type of experience in elementary.

"I wanted to give students the opportunity to work with real world scenarios in the classroom and to teach students how to think creatively in order to solve problems," White said. "This is what we do every day in my classroom."

Lancaster ISD Belt Line Elementary Principal Wendy Hawthorne describes White as a teacher who sets no limits on her students and said that there are many qualities that make her stand out as an educator.

"Not only is Mrs. White eager to learn, but she is eager to share her learning with her students," Hawthorne said. "She is willing to try anything new in her classroom and expects her students to rise to the occasion."

It is not unusual for one to see students moving around in Mrs. White's class working together to communicate their ideas to their peers. She said this will help the students in the future.

"The skills students are learning in my class are based on the real world," White said. "Their ability to think critically and be natural problem solvers is what companies will be looking for when they leave Lancaster ISD."

White enjoys the flexibility she has in her classroom. Unlike a traditional classroom, her students move around the room in groups using Google Chromebooks to perform coding activities, building animations as well as solving real life problems in groups.

"I tell them all the furniture in my lab is moveable and they can create their own learning space with their peers to solve problems," White said. "I do not give them any answers, instead I give them tools to research the problems and solve problems together."

White was nominated by Lancaster ISD's Director of Blended Learning Kimberly Clark for the computer science award.

"Ms. White has created a culture of innovation at her elementary school," Clark said. "She is the definition of innovation."

White is happy to be recognized for this award. However, her motivation is that she enjoys seeing students learn.

"When you see the smiles on the students' faces when they are able to solve a coding puzzle, it is awesome," White said. "The best thing about being a teacher is seeing students excited about what they are learning."