

Aislinn Herrera teaches teen leadership and coaches the step team at Morton Ranch High School

As a teen leadership teacher, I hope that my students walk away with the ability to improve and develop better relationships, identify their goals, and take active roles in society.

- Aislinn Herrera

STEPPING UP TO *Leadership*

Homegrown Katyite, Aislinn Herrera, guides Morton Ranch High School students to step in the right direction using life-changing encouragement

Written by Kennan Buckner | Photography by Ellie Goodridge

On a typical school day, Morton Ranch High School's (MRHS) teen leadership teacher, Aislinn Herrera, arrives on campus at 6:15 a.m. to get her classroom ready. She always keeps her day planner on hand and is usually carrying her red CrossFit Yeti full of black coffee. As an Olympic weightlifting junkie who loves her two adopted fur-babies, this five-foot-tall teacher begins each day ready to lead students by example.

Every teen leadership class begins with a session she calls "good things," a time for students to share positive things that are happening in their lives. As for Herrera, the good things her students and coworkers have to say about her are being noticed. She was recently nominated for the LifeChanger of the Year award from National Life Group, and she couldn't be happier. "Every day I realize that I am exactly where I want to be in my career - making a difference and encouraging kids to become their best selves," says Herrera.

True to Her Roots

She comes from a long line of educators. Her father was principal at Oilton Elementary and later assistant principal at Edison Middle and Furr High Schools. A homegrown Katyite, Herrera attended Memorial Parkway Junior High (MPJH) and she was a Pacesetter at Taylor High School where she graduated in 2006. After graduating from Louisiana State University, she began teaching in Baton Rouge. "After several years away, I decided to move back and Morton Ranch became my new home, thanks to my former MPJH counselor turned MRHS assistant principal, Richard Celestine."

Keeping in Step

Herrera is also the school's step team coach, a team unique to the campus. "Our team focuses on percussive dance by using our bodies to make beats," says Herrera. "It definitely requires a lot of practice and the girls on our team put in an incredible amount of time and effort into perfecting their skills." The group performs at pep rallies, basketball games, and other campus functions. "When I'm passionate about something, I give my heart and soul to it," she says. This is quickly evident to friends and family by the fact that all she talks about are her students and her job.

Being Your Best

Taking teen leadership herself taught Herrera that every



Herrera with members of the step team

person wants to be heard, valued, and loved. These are values her former Katy ISD teachers embodied. She says of her fellow teachers, "Their ability to see potential and have faith in the ability of their students motivated me to show the same faith and find the same potential in my own students."

This is something junior Taliah Taylor has experienced. "Ms. Herrera is always telling personal stories and how she's learned from them," says Taylor. "I love her with all my heart and will forever be grateful to have her in my life." This guidance and encouragement is what lead her to be named Teacher of the Year for the 2016-2017 school year.

Take What You Need

Herrera's class is more than just talk; she also started a "Take What You Need" board filled with encouragement, motivation, and compliments handwritten on sticky notes. Junior Syasya Thompson has often taken stickies from the board. "If I'm feeling a little insecure, I'll grab a 'You are beautiful' note," she says. "I always know no matter what kind of day I have had, Ms. Herrera's class will always cheer me up."

Kindness Goes a Long Way

Junior Isamar Sandoval says the open and friendly environment Herrera creates is appreciated. "She is always making everyone feel welcome and her students care for her so much," Sandoval says. "We look up to her, and she truly inspires people to better themselves."

Herrera is sure to end each class by giving students a hug, handshake, or high-five and tells them, "If no one has told you yet today, I love you, and I hope you choose to make good choices." KM

Fun Facts

- ★ Loves writing and teaching calligraphy
- ★ Has a deaf and blind Australian shepherd named Axl and a three-legged toy fox terrier named Boo Radley
- ★ Her favorite spots in Katy are Fidelis CrossFit, her parents' house, and Katy Budget Books

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