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## F.S. Key Teacher Named Mayor's Teacher of the Month

by Suzanne Kelley

Teacher, friend, mentor, professor, rebel, leader, mother, these are all ways one could describe Sheila Maffei. Many of us at Francis Scott Key were not surprised to hear that Sheila was chosen for Teacher of the Month



by Mayor Gavin Newsom, for her hard work and dedication to our school is evident every day. Sheila is not only a towering figure in her own classroom but she also fills in as Principal, substitute or shoulder to cry on. She is a leader among the staff and helps to make our school the best it can be. We are so blessed to have her at our school.

Sheila always knew she enjoyed being a leader. From a very young age she enjoyed showing others how to do something and then guiding them as they learned to do it themselves. In this way you could say she always wanted to be a teacher. She received her teaching credential straight out of college as a young woman, but unfortunately she found herself in times very similar to ours today with a struggling economy and no teaching jobs available. Sheila put her teaching dreams on hold and got a job working in retail. The years passed by; she got married and raised a family. It was working in the school of her own children that brought her back to her original dream of teaching.

Sheila's children went to Commodore Sloat Elementary School here in SF and with a fellow mother at the school she created a Perceptual Motor Skills Development program. The program was very successful and Sheila wanted all students at the school to be able to participate in it. There was a Special Education class there, which had not been included. At that time, mainstreaming of special education students was not commonplace in the school community. Sheila insisted that these students participate. Working with these students in her program reignited her passion for teaching, but sent her in the new direction of working with students with special needs.

Shortly after that, Sheila went back to San Francisco State and received her credential in Special Education working

with students with moderate to severe disabilities as well as obtaining a masters in Special Education. She started out working as an Inclusion Specialist. In this capacity she was able to help students with special needs be included in the General Education curriculum and classrooms. She ran a very successful Inclusion Program for a few years and was then approached to start a completely new program for the district. Being known in the district as someone who can think outside of the box, Sheila was ready to take on the challenge of building a completely new program from the ground up.

The program was called ITALC, which stands for Instruction Through Assistive Learning and Communication. This program was designed for students with severe physical disabilities, who require wheel chairs and are considered non-verbal. There is no other program of its kind within the district and even people from out of state have wanted to enroll their children here. The ITALC program has been a success for over 10 years, educating students and using technology to reach their highest potential. She continues to grow as an educator and is now pursuing an administrative credential.

When asked about her teaching philosophy Sheila responds with, "I could tell you what a child can't do, but let me show you what a child can do." This pretty much sums up what Sheila has been doing since she began in education; showing students and staff alike what they can do. Her classroom is child directed and child centered. Her job is not to tell students what they can't do, but show them all the incredible things they can.

When asked what has been the highlight so far of her teaching career, she says being nominated for this award and working with such diverse people and parents. She says that to this day she is in awe of the type of trust that many of her parents put in her and that she is honored to work with her students and families.

Sheila is also very proud to be a part of the Francis Scott Key community. She revels in the fact that whenever she tells people about our school she is garnished with praise. People know what an amazing school we have. People tell her that they hear it is one of the best schools and that we are exemplary in many ways, especially in Special Education. For that notability, we as a school and community have Sheila to thank. Her hard work and dedication to the ITALC program and all of the other things she does around our school continue to enhance our reputation. Sheila told me that a friend of hers once told her that, "You remind people like a sore thumb." I think we'll take a sore thumb any day if that means having Sheila at our school. ■