

“When I pop my head into her room, she is more than likely to be singing, dancing, or using movement, innovation and technology to engage her students in whatever she is teaching that day. It is no wonder the Kindergarteners are always so happy! Mrs. Hart sets the standard!” These are the kinds of accolades you will hear from fellow-teachers about Mrs. Heather Hart, the Kindergarten teacher at St. Peter in Chains School. Mrs. Hart is warm, enthusiastic, and patient. Most of all, she loves her students. She is very organized and has a great work ethic. Mrs. Hart is “a wave of happiness” and a “breath of fresh air” at our school. Her enthusiasm, positive outlook, drive to always give more of herself, and her dedication are inspiring to her students and her fellow teachers. She is passionate about teaching and finding what works best so that each of her students can be successful in the classroom.

Mrs. Hart feels that the classroom is a family, so she strives to build authentic relationships with students, parents, grandparents, siblings or any significant family member. She also partners Kindergartners with their 4<sup>th</sup> grade “buddies” who sit with them at the weekly school Mass and other school prayer services, help them with Bookfair and Santa Shop, and even write stories about them. Parents and grandparents are given lots of opportunities to volunteer—from reading to students in the library, assisting in the computer lab, or even gardening with students in a plot of land behind the school building. Additionally, Mrs. Hart brings in members of the community at large such as police personnel, fire fighters, dentists, and detectives. The “family feel” and mutual support in Kindergarten class, along with a positive classroom management style has led not only to the prevention of behavior problems, but a very productive learning environment.

One parent of Kindergarten students said, “My experiences with Heather Hart have been very positive. I have three children, two of which are old enough to have been with her in

Kindergarten. They are very different personalities and learning styles. Mrs. Hart catered to each of them differently and gave them the confidence to be good students in all areas. They both enjoyed learning and felt loved and valued.” She went on to describe how impressed she was to see the class in action. Rather than asking students to hold up their hands for participation, she encouraged the kids to stand when they agreed with certain statements, to do a dance at a certain part of the day, and to be very active and involved. The students in Mrs. Hart’s class are kept very busy and engaged. They don’t have time to grow antsy, but rather, they stay involved and are able to learn through the process.

Not only does Mrs. Hart look for ways to help students grow, but she continually looks for professional development opportunities for herself as well. As part of a STEM Fellowship at the Dayton Regional STEM Center, Mrs. Hart worked with a team of educators, local STEM industry professionals, and university professors to develop and write STEM curriculum at the Kindergarten level which was recently published! She has also participated in the Kindergarten Teachers Conference, a gathering focused on the needs of Kindergarten teachers and students. Mrs. Hart’s innovative lessons engage all the senses and learning styles. For example, she has been transitioning the class to be more STEM-based. Additionally, Mrs. Hart has been involved in the last two years with developing Religion curriculum for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Catholic Schools, piloting standards-based report cards, and trying new programs such as “Handwriting Without Tears”, all in an effort to find the best way to help students learn. From scavenger hunts at the zoo, utilizing concepts learned in Science, or tailoring lessons to individual learning styles and needs, to using wobble cushions to help students focus, she allows students to learn in a way that works for them.

As a parent, parishioner, and teacher at St. Peter in Chains Church and School, Mrs. Hart has been very active in the community. She has been a Girl Scout leader after school for a school-based troop, participated as a teacher for Vacation Bible School over the summer, been active in the parish community religion education efforts, and is currently serving on an exploratory committee for a preschool in the community. Additionally, Mrs. Hart is currently serving on a team for implementing standards-based grading at both the local and district levels.

With a data-driven approach to teaching and learning, Mrs. Hart describes lesson plans as “working documents” which she continually updates. She spends every summer assessing and refining lessons, looking for new ideas, for hands-on learning strategies, and maps out the year. She has mentored several teachers and is always willing to share her knowledge and expertise in an effort to help others grow as educators. Our teacher, Mrs. Hart, has had a great influence in laying the foundation for our youngest students and has aided them in developing new skills which will benefit them for a lifetime.