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EDITOR'S PICK

Twin sisters making impact in Briggs classrooms

Renee Fite/ TDP Special Writer Nov 18, 2014



Twins and Briggs teachers Arden Sampson, sitting, and Allison Dillard discuss plans for students.

Photo by Renee Fite/Daily Press



Not every school district has twin teachers like Briggs educators Allison Dillard and Arden Sampson.

Dillard teaches in special education, while Sampson teaches third grade. Both Cherokee County natives have taught for 25 years. Dillard worked in a special-education classroom at Keys for 22

years before moving to Briggs. Sampson taught third grade at Rocky Mountain in Adair County her first year, and has been at Briggs the past 24 years.

The two graduated from Tahlequah High School in 1986 and from Northeastern State University, with education degrees, in 1990.

In Dillard's mind, teaching is a rewarding profession. Teaching special education enables her to have children for two or three years in a row.

"It gives me the opportunity to monitor their academic progress not just one year, but the two to three years I have them," Dillard said. "This also gives me the opportunity to build a good rapport with their families."

Nothing makes Sampson happier than to have a former student tell her how much he enjoyed his time at Briggs, or what he remembered about third grade.

"Some are funny stories, but many remember this is the grade they learned their multiplication or how to write in cursive," said Sampson.

Teaching with her twin sister is "pretty cool," Sampson said.

"We are super-close," said Sampson. "Probably one of the best things is that she is able to be a part of my two children's lives. My kids are very active [at Briggs] and she is able to watch and support them."

Dillard agrees teaching with her twin is "a lot of fun."

"For years, we taught across the county from each other, and we were rivals. Now we are cheering for the same team," Dillard said. "We were close before, but this has made us even closer."

Sampson feels like she was called to teach and follow in the footsteps of family members.

"That's all I ever even thought about doing," said Sampson. "My parents, grandparents, and several of my aunts and uncles were teachers. I felt this was an admirable profession and it was going to allow me to stay involved with my own children while providing a fun, learning environment for other children."

Dillard said the twins' father, the late Zeke Rozell, was a coach at Keys School before becoming a

turkey farmer. Their mother, Nadine Rozell, taught for 31 years – 24 of those years at Greenwood Elementary.

“Both of them had a passion for the welfare and education of other children. That was something that was instilled in me,” said Dillard. “I knew in my heart during high school I wanted to teach special education when I became friends with a young man named Brian. I am glad I chose this profession because it has allowed me to watch as children learn and grow into successful young adults. I have also worked with some of the most hard-working, caring, thoughtful, and dedicated teachers in the area. What I have learned from my co-workers and my students has carried over into my classroom and my own family.”

Sampson said she and Dillard always enjoy hearing how their mom made a difference in other students’ lives when she was a teacher.

“My biggest mentors and supporters would be our mom and dad. My whole life, I have had people tell me how much they enjoyed being in her class or how she was their favorite teacher. I hope someday my children have people tell them I had some kind of positive influence in their life,” said Sampson.

Sampson said their father was a hard worker, and she admits she always hated having to work for him on the weekends.

“Little did I know that at the time, he was teaching us about responsibility and working together,” said Sampson. “Our parents instilled good morals and values in us, and I hope that I am setting a good example through my actions for my own children and students.”

Through her parents and other family members in education, Dillard experienced first-hand the concern the best teachers have for children, and how rewarding it is to support them in and out of the classroom.

“You want high expectations for your students, but often, students with special needs take longer to reach those expectations. That requires patience and lots of resources,” said Dillard.

Even though she’s only allowed 10 students per class, she may have three or four lessons to teach during that period.

“Classroom management is very crucial,” said Dillard. “My friend and co-worker for 12 years, Julie Slack, taught me strategies as to handle difficult behaviors. Without confiding in her at times, I am

not sure I would have continued on with teaching as long as I have.”

Both women know that involved parents encourage students.

“I would like to encourage parents to continue to be involved in your child’s education and school. If you have questions or opinions about something you think might have happened at school or during school hours, please do not post all over social media without first giving the teacher or administration the opportunity to clarify. Get both sides to your child’s story before getting others involved,” Sampson suggests.

For the past 24 years, Dillard has noticed a decline of the emphasis parents have put on their children’s academics, but an increased focus on extracurricular activities. She hopes parents impress upon children the importance of excelling in academics as much as activities outside the classroom.

“Don’t get me wrong: I am as competitive as the next person, and I love sports,” said Dillard. “But nursery rhymes, singing, and reading to them nightly help with developmental skills. Helping study math facts and spelling words, making sure the child is completing homework and studying need to be priorities each night. Be an advocate for your child, but not a hindrance. Students need to know what consequences are and how to solve problems on their own.”

Family is especially a priority. Dillard said that for years, she spent summers following her son, Dalton, as he played baseball. Now she follows her daughter, Erin, who plays softball. She also works a second job at Northeastern Health Systems in Tahlequah. Dillard has been married for 24 years to Rusty Dillard, a teacher and coach at Tahlequah. She has been a member of Beta Sigma Phi-Mu Omega, a women’s social sorority, for 22 years.

“My favorite thing to do is spend time on Baron Fork Creek or at Lake Tenkiller with family and friends,” said Dillard.

Sampson enjoys attending her children’s sporting events, traveling, and spending summer days on the Baron Fork Creek. She has been married to Terry Sampson for almost 25 years, and they have three children: Erica, 21, a senior softball player at the University of Tulsa; Emily, 14, an eighth-grader at Briggs; and Synjin, 7, a first-grader at Briggs.

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