This month's Employee Spotlight is Sandra Merriweather. Currently a Special Education teacher and campus contact at Pease Elementary School, Ms. Merriweather has worked at Austin ISD for 10 years. During that time, she served as an ESL 4th grade and 3rd grade bilingual teacher.

Diversity. That’s what Ms. Merriweather loves about teaching in Austin ISD. She loves teaching students from diverse backgrounds and helping them learn how to be successful.

Her personal philosophy on customer service is to treat others with respect, fairness, honesty, and kindness. Working with our special needs students, she reminds us that we all have abilities and disabilities because we are human. Ms. Merriweather accepts each of her students and meets them where they are. She helps them to understand that it is okay to think and learn differently. Each student has gifts, talents and abilities and Sandra develops strong relationships with their parents to ensure that what she does in the classroom is reinforced at home. For her, communication is key.

Ms. Merriweather’s best customer service experience involved a student who was experiencing low self-esteem because of something another student had said about her. Sandra asked the student if she believed what the student said was true. The student told her that she didn’t.

Ms. Merriweather explained to the student that people will have various opinions but the most important thing for each of us to do is to hold on to what we know is true about ourselves. She continued to tell the student that if she is kind and does her best to help others everything will work out. Sandra encouraged the student to feel the love of our families and friends and share that with others, we will be alright. A few weeks later, the student’s mother approached her with words of appreciation because she had helped her daughter to see the beauty within herself. Being an educator is a public service and this experience reinvigorated her.

Ms. Merriweather draws her inspiration from her parents and retired Army Veteran husband. Knowing how to lead is important, but also knowing how to follow is just as important.

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AISD CARES Book of the Month

In The Service Culture Handbook, the author outlines a step-by-step blueprint for organizations to follow if they are serious about great customer service being the rule and not the exception. Building a culture of great customer service is hard work. The author says, “Culture isn’t a side project. It’s a way of doing business that should be integrated into everything you do, and it needs unmistakable executive sponsorship if it’s going to work. Building a strong culture takes time and full commitment.”

To get the most out of this book, be prepared to roll up your sleeves and get to work. You’ll learn how to collaborate with your team to establish a clear customer service vision and a set of core values that will serve as a guide — constantly reminding everyone of how you the organization treats customers. In addition, you’ll learn how to effectively communicate the vision as well as hire, train, empower, and manage to it.

The book is packed with great examples of leading organizations that truly have engrained a culture of great service. Companies like REI, Safelite Auto Glass, Shake Shack, and others. You’ll hear about stories of employees so committed to the service culture that they go to extraordinary measures to take care of their customers. You will learn of one company’s employees that carried diesel fuel up to the 17th floor of a building in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy to keep a diesel generator running so customer websites wouldn’t go down.

The Service Culture Handbook will make a great addition to anyone’s library that is interested in making a positive impact in customer service at any organization.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Customers don’t expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong.”

Donald Porter, V.P. British Airways

APPRECIATION DATES FOR MAY

May 6–10
Teacher and Substitute Teacher Appreciation Week
School Health Team Appreciation Week

May 8
National Teacher Day

May 9
National School Nurse Day

May 13–17
Police Officer and Security Appreciation Week
As of April 30, Let’s Talk! has received 992 dialogues! The top five interest areas make up 48% of all dialogues submitted. Staff continue to beat vendor experience with other school districts in average response time and average customer experience rating. We intend to add more departments in mid-May. Look for an update in the upcoming weeks. Visit Let’s Talk! 24 hours a day, seven days a week at austinisd.org/hr/customer-service/lets-talk.
New HQ Open Office

Five Etiquette Tips on How To Work in an Open Office Environment

As we move to the New HQ, the old ways of conducting business will fade away. One of the biggest changes will be the open office concept. Transitioning from offices and cubicles to an open floorplan encourages collaboration but it can also lead to distraction. Here are a few tips to guide us to an efficient and effective work environment.

Respect Privacy
In an open office environment, employees work close to each other where you can see your colleague’s computer screen and overhear their phone conversations. This may be a cause of concern for some. For confidential conversations, please use one of the phone rooms. Quiet rooms and huddle spaces are also available.

Keep it Clean
Since we won’t have doors or cubicles, your space is a shared space and mess is a shared mess. Be sure to wipe down your area on a regular basis, remove food or drinks, and keep your area organized.

Shhh…Quiet Please
Inside voices, please. Noise travels far in an open office. Even if you are not distracted by music or talking, it may distract others near you.

Remember to be aware of the volume of the ringer on your phone, the cute ringtone of your cell phone, the audible “ding” of your new email message, and the music playing on your computer.

Consider using headphones to listen to music, silencing your cell, turning your ringer down to a low tone and turning off your audible computer notifications.

Be Scentsible
Remember that some people are sensitive to certain scents. Go easy on the cologne and perfume. To assist in keeping work areas clean and food smells at a minimum, please eat in the break area and not at your desk.

Be Considerate
Put yourself in your colleague’s shoes and think about how you would like to be treated or how you would like them to conduct themselves. Consideration and respect go a long way, especially in an open office environment.

Adapted from Open Office: 5 Etiquette Tips for Workers, by Sammi Caramela. businessnewsdaily.com/10913-open-office-etiquette.html
The following employees were nominated for providing outstanding customer service by ensuring an exceptional customer experience is had by those with whom they came into contact. If you would like to recognize a colleague who exemplifies the highest level of customer service in all interactions, please complete a nomination form at https://www.austinisd.org/hr/customer-service/rave.

Alejandra Gonzalez, Teacher, Brentwood ES
Amber Laroche, Principal, Brentwood ES
Anthony Bromberg, Asst. Principal, Murchison MS
Bradley Lancaster, Academy Director, Akins HS
Cathy Heath, Temporary Administrator, Learning Support
Cecilia Gutierrez, Teacher, Akins HS
Chaitra McGrew, Asst. Principal, Houston ES
Courtney Jackson, Teacher, LBJ ECHS
Crystal Martinez, Facilitator, ALC
Cynthia Diaz, Counselor, Small MS
David Reinhart, Asst. Director, TAD
Dru McGovern-Robinett, Executive Director, TAD
Eliza Saenz, Asst. Principal, Blazier ES
Gareth Horwood, Counselor, Anderson HS
Guillermo De Leon, Help Desk Specialist IV, Customer Support

Henry Tang, Programmer/Analyst, MIS
Hugh Johnson, Bus Driver, Saegert Transportation Center
Irma Lira, Payroll Specialist II, Finance
Janie Garza, Bus Driver, Nelson Field/Utility
Jordan Benson, Academy Director, Crockett HS
Justin Slocum, Network Architect, Network Support Services
Kara Schultz, Asst. Principal, Ridgetop ES
Kaysie Fernandez, Multi-Tiered Coach, Learning Support
Lillian Fortiscue, Admin. Asst. II, Brentwood ES
Linda Vann, Teacher Asst., Bowie HS
Lisa Bush, Admin. Supervisor, Middle School Office
Marta Johnson, Asst. Principal, Padron ES
Matthew Tiffee, Admin. Supervisor, Legal Services
Randy Campbell, Maint. Apprentice II, Service Center
Raul Vallejo, Parent Support Specialist, Pillow ES
Ricardo Tovar, Building Operator III, Service Center
Rick Botello, Building Operator III, Service Center
Rosa Peña, Director, Talent Acquisition and Development
Rudolph Matheny, Teacher, Austin HS
Sandino Nunez, Plumbing Specialist, Service Center
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Sandra believes that customer service is critical to the success of Austin ISD because it’s our identity and how we are perceived by the public.

We selected Sandra because of an email received from a foster parent. He was so appreciative of the assistance provided by Ms. Merriweather that helped him get his foster child enrolled in the right school and the right program. The parent stated that Ms. Merriweather “went above and beyond and was extremely professional, helpful, and sympathetic to my needs.” She is the definition of exceptional customer service.