

Kennedy is saying goodbye

Written by Chris Lee

April Fool's jokes were the first thing that came to her mind when asked what she will miss the most about teaching.

She was thinking back to a time when the piano in her music classroom mysteriously disappeared during lunch and wasn't returned until school was out for the day.

Holyoke Elementary School literacy coordinator and longtime music teacher Nancy Kennedy is packing up her office—for real this time.

Two years ago, she announced her retirement but stayed at the school and has worked half days.

"I guess it's just time," Kennedy said about her decision. "There's no special reason." There are the typical reasons—traveling and spending some time with the grandchildren.

"I will definitely miss the kids," Kennedy said, admitting it's a cliché answer. She said she loves working with students and really enjoys seeing those "aha" moments.



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Holyoke Elementary School literacy coordinator and long-time music teacher Nancy Kennedy is closing the book on a long education career. □ □
—Enterprise photo

In all, Kennedy has logged 25 years of teaching experience in Holyoke, plus an additional three in other towns for a grand total of 28 years.

“I never thought about doing anything else,” Kennedy said. Her father was a teacher, as are two of her children.

She has been fortunate enough to have spent time teaching in two areas she is truly passionate about—music and reading.

She began teaching in Haxtun for a year. Then it was off to Eaton and finally Dalton, Neb. After three years of teaching, it was time to raise her kids. She took some time off to raise three children. When her youngest entered school, Kennedy moved back into the classroom in Holyoke, where she taught music for 18 years. She began teaching music in grades K-8 and later moved to K-6.

When Jim Yakel was still principal, the reading program was moved into one block and all the teachers were involved. Kennedy, who received her teaching degree in K-6 elementary education from the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, was prepared to help be a part of the reading program.

She switched to her current role seven years ago.

She said she has worked with some tremendous staff and faculty members over the years.

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When she was a reading coach, she was able to be in individual classrooms and attributes much of her learning to those teachers. “I learned more, I know, than I could ever give back,” Kennedy said. “It was really a tremendous gift to me.”

A highlight of her teaching was receiving the Emerald Award for innovation in 2010. It was given for the changes that the school made while she was the Reading First reading coach. “We incorporated data-based instruction, used scientifically-researched curriculum, aligned teaching to best teaching practices and provided needs-based reading intervention,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy and husband Jack have three children, Celena, Dan and Anita; and six grandchildren. Celena lives in Sterling and teaches special education in Merino. Dan and wife Leah live in Brush where he coaches basketball and teaches high school social studies. Anita and husband DeWane Dow live in Holdrege, Neb. where she is an accountant for her church.

Kennedy wanted to share her educational philosophy as she prepares to say goodbye to the place she has known for so long. She truly believes in W.B. Yeats, who said, “Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.”

Another thing that sort of brings a smile to her face is when students walk up to her and say “I remember when ...”

Kennedy said she hopes she will be remembered for more than just “Little Blue Man” and “Don Gato.” “I hope I’ve accomplished more than just those two songs,” Kennedy said with a chuckle.

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