

Family Ties

Came For The Job, Found A Family And Then Some

(February 1, 2024) GEORGETOWN, TX — Tara Garner is passionate about teaching. She feels like it’s her calling. But sometimes a change of scenery is necessary, especially when your previous employer is being monitored by the TEA.

“I didn’t have what works at my last stop,” said Ms. Garner, currently an instructional coach and middle school cheer coach with Gateway College Prep. “I found it at Gateway.”

Those two things she knew worked to make a great school were highly skilled teachers and involved parents. Tara started at Gateway in 2011 and has been here ever since. In fact, Tara is one of five “originals”, a phrase coined by a core group of teachers who have been together at Gateway for 13 years.



Because Ms. Garner first experienced Gateway as a staff member, she understood the inner workings and values at Orenda. There was no doubt that once her own children were school-aged, they would become Gators.

“At Gateway we have parents who value education, value good behavior and value manners. And when teachers are willing to build relationships with their students and hold students

accountable, greatness can happen,” said Ms. Garner. “Success requires a team effort – teachers, students and parents working together.”

Tara comes by her job title of ‘coach’ naturally – her father, Gary Franke, is a long time coach who spent decades in professional baseball. With the 2020 pandemic changing his career landscape, Coach Franke took some time off. He enjoyed spending extra time with the grandkids and attended many school programs at Gateway. Then, the stars aligned.

“I fully believe God led me to Gateway,” said Coach Franke, in his third year at Prep. “Teaching for me has come full circle...I taught a long time ago, and my professional career helped prepare me for this.”

Coach Franke serves as a PE teacher and head baseball coach and he has five grandchildren attending Gateway Prep. For Tara and sister-in-law, Jenny (who has also worked in various roles at Gateway for years), this family affair is a case of déjà vu.

“When I was in elementary school, my dad was my PE teacher. So to see him coach my kids is such a blessing,” said Ms. Garner. “It reminds me that all things happen as a part of God’s bigger plan.”

With her youngest child in fourth grade, the Garner family could be here for many more years to come. That prospect is just fine for Tara.

“I get to work with my family. You could not pay me enough to go back to traditional ISDs,” said Ms. Garner. “What we are doing here, other districts would die for.”

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About Orenda Education

Orenda Education is the sponsoring entity for Orenda Charter School District, an “open-enrollment charter school district.” Fueled by educators and parents passionate about school choice, Orenda Charter School District operates four Central Texas campuses serving 1,900 students, providing innovative instructional methods to help students reach their academic and human potential. For more information, visit orendaeducation.org.