

Teacher Feature: Debbie Hampton

Helping Students Connect with What Inspires Them

It is apparent that fourth-grade teacher Debbie Hampton loves her job. She left her first career in banking to become a DPS paraprofessional while raising her two children. That move evolved into graduating from the Center for Urban Education's teaching program through the University of Northern Colorado. Since graduating 11 years ago, she has been teaching at Lena Archuleta Elementary School.

Debbie's passion for teaching comes from the belief that every child has potential. "I want to make a difference in kids' lives and let them know nothing is out of their reach.

No matter their circumstances, they have the power to make a magnificent life."



Teacher Debbie Hampton and Shadow the service dog (far right) with the fourth grade highly gifted and talented class at Lena Archuleta Elementary School.

Debbie decided to pursue another passion of hers and started training service dogs through Canine Partners of the Rockies last summer. Her current trainee, Shadow, a five-month-old black Labrador puppy, is in the classroom with her each day. Debbie saw this as a way to model for her students how you can find something that inspires you, have fun and learn a lot in the process.

Although the whole school claims Shadow as their own, Debbie has created a special process for students to be responsible for Shadow's needs throughout the day. Each week, two students, who are required to complete a "puppy raiser" application, are responsible for getting him water, treats and teaching him basic commands during recess. As for the rest of the time, while Debbie teaches, Shadow lays on the floor under the desk or settles down next to a student.

It will be difficult for the kids to say goodbye to Shadow when his training is complete, however they are being taught that this is an opportunity to give back to someone in need. At Archuleta, the school culture is built on the idea of showing kindness and giving back, so the service dog program is a great way to demonstrate those qualities.

The school leadership has been very welcoming and supportive of having Shadow at school. Debbie introduced the idea to her principal and from there they reached out to risk management and the department of safety and security to complete the process and ensure they weren't breaking any rules.

When asked about what makes Archuleta a special school, Debbie says, "Our mantra is discover your Einstein. Every child is valued whatever their ability and they are expected to grow. The staff works so well together to help each child find their inner Einstein whatever it may be. I love my job and being a classroom teacher. It is important for me to let students know we can have fun learning."

More than 550 students attend Lena Archuleta Elementary School in northeast Denver. The student population is 77% Hispanic, 12% black, 5% white, 2% Asian and less than 1% American Indian. Eighty-seven percent of students receive free and reduced lunch and 59% are considered English language learners; another 7% receive special education.