

# ETBU students serve in local elementary schools

May 9, 2023

As part of its mission as a Christ-centered institution, East Texas Baptist University prioritizes community engagement in the education and development of students.

Whether through serving at a food pantry, cleaning up after tornadoes or partnering with local elementary schools, ETBU provides their students real-life service experience and integration into the local community.

ETBU partners with the Marshall Independent School District in several ways, including through the university's learning and leading classes, honors courses and athletic teams.

Every student takes a learning and leading class their first semester. This class involves learning how to be a Christ-centered leader in one's community.



The ETBU freshman class plans and organizes fall festivals during their Learning and Leading courses and

the freshman honors program by setting up booths and planning games and prizes. (ETBU Photo)

As coordinator of these classes, Vanessa Johnston works in the office of academic success and explains she helps “plan out the curriculum, provide training for the instructors, and coordinate all of the correspondence with Marshall ISD.”

ETBU learning and leading students perform weekly service within the elementary schools. Service is “one hour a week, doing anything that the schools need them to do” Johnston said.

Tasks could include “helping the teachers with small groups, helping in PE, making copies, or anything that would be beneficial for that school at the time of the service,” she added.

Every fall, ETBU learning and leading classes and honors students staff a fall festival for several local elementary schools. This provides children with a day of festive fun to celebrate and enjoy time with one another and the college students.

Principal Tamiaka Johnson at William B. Travis Elementary in Marshall described ETBU’s involvement in the local school system as “instrumental” and the college students as “unsung heroes.”

Johnson, who has spent 18 years working in education—first as a classroom teacher in Marshall and the last six as principal—said the college students are vital to the functioning of the local schools.

With more than 50 regular volunteers who do anything from “opening doors for the students” to “helping with dismissal processes,” Travis Elementary relies on their partnership with ETBU, she said.

Sara Braun, vice president for communication and strategic initiatives at ETBU, noted the benefits involvement in community service through the elementary schools provides college students.

“It’s awesome to see how working with these [elementary] kids impacts our students,” both throughout their weekly service as well as during the fall festivals, she said.

Whether ETBU students are reading to the schoolchildren, leading them in groups, helping the teacher, or participating in the festivals, they are served in return, she asserted.

## **ETBU students see they can ‘make a difference’**

Johnston explained the college students “are able to see that they can make a difference in their community.” She added ETBU hopes after students graduate, “they can remember what an impact they had and want to continue serving.”

After all, the kind of service students learn at ETBU is “what we’re called to do as Christians,” Johnston said.



ETBU student-athletes spent time teaching an average of 60 children per week the fundamentals of baseball and sharing their faith. (ETBU Photo)

In addition to the learning and leading classes, ETBU sports teams also invest their time and efforts into serving the elementary schools. Ryan Erwin, director of athletics and vice president of student engagement, explained the athletic teams have been active in serving their local school district.

Reflecting on the fall 2022 semester, he said “the hockey team went to Sam Houston, to their Boys and Girls after school program, and taught hockey to the students.”

Additionally, both the men’s and women’s soccer teams and the volleyball team participated in Read Across America.

“They got to read books during Read Across America week. It was really good,” Erwin said. “We hit every classroom, so it was really cool.”

Addison Funk, junior captain of the soccer team, said the experience was “great for the team” and helped her envision her future as a teacher.

Volunteering in any capacity, but especially in the elementary schools, is a great opportunity for college students who “have a desire to get into education” Johnson noted.

“It is so fulfilling for them” she said. And it ultimately serves ETBU’s higher goal of integrating education and Christian service.

*Rose Comstive, a student at East Texas Baptist University, served this semester as an intern with the Baptist Standard.*

