

# Deborah Wagner: A veteran teacher who's continuing to learn

December 7, 2020

Deborah Wagner is a district speech-language pathologist for the Lytle Independent School District, where she has worked for 24 years. She is [one of nine](#) public school educators who received the 2020 BEST—Baptist Educators Serving Texans—award. Wagner is an active member of First Baptist Church in Devine, where she serves in numerous capacities, and a graduate of [Baylor University](#). From deep in the heart of one Texan, she shares her background and thoughts on being a Christian in public education.

To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated educator to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## Background

### Where else have you served, and what were your positions there?

I worked for a home health care company briefly while still employed with Lytle Independent School District. I have not worked in any other school districts.

### Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Devine, Texas, where I attended First Baptist Church.

## **How did you come to faith in Christ?**

I grew up attending church with my parents and grandparents. My family was involved in church ministry, just as I am today. I spent much of my time at church, but it was the influence of my parents and grandparents that led me to Christ.

My grandfather was a deacon in our church, and I learned much from his servant leadership. As a child, I remember my grandmother and mother reading Scripture and singing hymns that were so encouraging.

My mom often played hymns on the piano, which made me learn and love to sing the “old school” hymns. My parents were involved in teaching Sunday school and always put church commitments first.

## **Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?**

I graduated from Baylor University in 1996 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in communication sciences and disorders. I graduated from Texas Woman’s University with a Master of Science degree in 1999.

## **About education**

### **Why do you feel called into education?**

When I graduated from college, my goal was to work in the health care industry as a speech-language pathologist. While in graduate school, I was required to work in a hospital setting. Although I enjoyed my time there, I did not feel the same connections to patients as I did to the students I served in the school district. In my position at my school district, I am able to work with a student for multiple years and form strong connections.

Working in a public school district provides an amazing opportunity to

share my faith through my actions and love for my students. That is the main reason I am called continually into education.

Before the pandemic, I felt it was time for me to move to a non-teaching position. However, during the pandemic, I realized I needed the students more than they needed me. Education is truly a calling, and I'm happy to say, even after all these years, I still am called to be an educator.

### **How does being a Christian influence your work in education?**

My work in education requires much patience and love for the students. My goal is to share my love for others and demonstrate a loving and patient spirit with my students, their parents and my coworkers. Simply trying to live in a Christian manner influences the attitudes and actions I convey in the work setting.

### **What one aspect of education gives you the greatest joy?**

It always is rewarding when former students share their memories and positive experiences. Recently, a former student located me on social media and posted about the positive impression I made on her education and life.

### **What one aspect of education would you like to change?**

School finance always has been a hot topic, even back when I began in 1996. I would like to see more funding for public education so all children can receive the best education possible.

### **How has your place in education or your perspective**

## **on education changed?**

When I began in 1996, speech therapy services were provided in a separate room—usually a small office or converted closet. There was little interaction with teachers and other staff.

Speech and language services have shifted to more of a team approach, and I provide more services in the general education and special education classrooms. This facilitates generalization of skills across environments and provides the staff opportunities for collaboration.

## **Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing education.**

During the pandemic, providing instruction for many students has been a challenge. Although our district has distributed technology to all, many students still are not completing assignments consistently.

Evident with my students is the challenge of competing with technology. Many of our students have possessed a device since they were toddlers and simply prefer to learn with technology. Not all skills, particularly verbal communication, can be modeled consistently through technology. Children still need adult and peer models to communicate effectively.

Health and safety of children during the pandemic is the most significant challenge currently. I believe schools are doing an excellent job of ensuring health and safety, but it definitely has been a challenge.

## **What did you learn on the job you wish you learned elsewhere?**

I have learned about conflict resolution and how to handle difficult situations with parents of my students. I wish I would have learned more about how to handle conflict before beginning my job in education.

## **What is the impact of education on your family?**

Working in the educational system has given my family—including my children—a greater understanding of the importance of education.

## **What do you wish more people knew about education?**

I wish the general public realized during this pandemic educators really are doing their best to face all these challenges. We are well aware of safety protocols and strive every day to give each child the best possible education without compromising the safety and health of our students.

## **If you could get one “do over” in education, what would it be, and why?**

If given the chance, I would have pursued an administrative career and/or a Ph.D. early in my career. At this point, I’m close to retirement and am debating whether that should be my next career move.

# **About Baptists**

## **Why are you Baptist?**

My grandparents and parents were Baptist; so, I grew up in the Baptist church. I remained a Baptist, because I love the focus on and commitment to missions we share as Baptist.

## **What are the key issues facing Baptists—denominationally and/or congregationally?**

Many Baptists are perceived as focused on legalistic views—a set of do’s and don’ts. This is an issue in reaching others and in recruiting new members to our denomination.

## **What would you change about the Baptist denomination—state, nation or local?**

Locally, I would like our church to be seen in the community as a church that focuses on local, state, national and foreign missions.

I would change the legalistic view that Baptists are a denomination of many rules and expectations, and focus on our commitment to evangelism and missions.

It also is important for Baptists to understand the Baptist Faith and Message. Many have forgotten that message and do not understand the importance of knowing why they affiliate with the Baptist church.

## **About Deborah**

### **Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?**

For my Christian walk, my parents and grandparents influenced my life greatly. I greatly admired them and their commitment to follow Christ.

My high school English teacher, Linda McAnelly, was a great influence. She always encouraged me to pursue my dreams. She was the one person who encouraged me to attend Baylor University and increased my confidence in my academic abilities.

### **Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.**

I enjoy the personal writing style of Max Lucado and how always enjoyed the complexity and alliteration in the books of C.S. Lewis.

## **What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?**

Philippians 4:13 is a great reminder and encourager: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

## **Who is your favorite person in the Bible, other than Jesus? Why?**

Paul is my favorite because of the importance of his missionary journeys. Also, knowing he endured much pain and imprisonment makes me realize how blessed and fortunate we are as Christians in today's society.

## **Name something about you that would surprise people who know you.**

Most people would be surprised to know I was a very shy child and didn't talk much. I still am nervous in groups and still have anxiety about speaking to large crowds of unfamiliar people. Several people have told me I look natural and comfortable speaking, but I usually don't feel that way.