

# Tammy Barrack: 'It's my job to give hope' to children

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Tammy Barrack teaches third grade at Packsaddle Elementary School in Kingsland. She is [one of nine](#) public school educators who received the 2020 BEST—Baptist Educators Serving Texans—award. Barrack is a member of First Baptist Church in Llano. From deep in the heart of one Texan, she shares her background and thoughts on being a Christian in public education.

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## Background

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

At Packsaddle, I have taught both third and fourth grades.

I spent 8 1/2 years teaching at McWhorter Elementary School in Mesquite. Mesquite Independent School District helped me complete my master's degree. So much of who I am as a teacher is because of what they taught me and allowed me to learn. At McWhorter, I taught sixth grade for six years and fourth grade for three years.

I entered my first classroom in Gallup, N.M., at Washington Elementary. I had the privilege of teaching kindergarten for three years. I am so blessed to have had the opportunities these schools and districts have provided and taught me.

I serve as the Kids4Christ director at First Baptist Church of Llano. My husband is the youth minister.

## **Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Waco.

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

At age 14, my pastor preached a sermon about Jesus. Having not grown up in a Bible-taught household, I didn't understand the tugging I felt previously on my heart. That day, I knew it was Jesus.

I accepted Christ in April 1991, and was baptized shortly thereafter. I began to serve in a second grade Sunday school class, so I could learn the stories I never had been taught.

At age 19, I met my husband. Craig was a youth pastor and taught me a great deal. Since we married in 1997, I have served beside him in ministry.

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

I have a Bachelor of Professional Studies degree from the [University of Mary-Hardin Baylor](#) and a Master of Curriculum and Instruction degree from Texas A&M-Commerce.

## **About education**

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

God has given me an ability to teach. I love to watch the sparks in the children's eyes as they come to understand a concept for the first time. I believe I make a difference in the lives of my students.

Children need loving teachers who will guide them and support them. My classroom is my mission field.

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

As a teacher in a public classroom, I do have to be careful. But at the same time, I am deliberate in telling my students and their parents I am a Christian. I encourage my students, support them and discipline them in a way that creates understanding and not mere punishment.

I have had opportunities to pray with and for the parents. I have counseled moms and dads, shared my own experiences as a mom of a child their children's age, and sent families to Christian resources we have in our community.

I do not push what I believe onto my families, yet I attempt to show them what a Christian is.

## **What is your favorite aspect of education? Why?**

Just recently, I was reminded why I do what I love. One of my students has been very apathetic, both currently and historically.

She and I sat down and reviewed a math concept. At first, she pretended to get it but couldn't duplicate the procedure. After a few minutes, she was not only able to duplicate the procedure, but also explain it back to me. She was so proud of herself.

I yelled out to the class how she learned the concept, and the whole class clapped for her. She was so proud of herself, and they were proud of her as well.

Creating an experience like this for an underachieving student, who has been retained once already and is on the brink of being referred to the

Special Ed department, is priceless. I pray she forever will remember this day, a day of success.

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

I am most proud of students who implement the values of kindness and generosity I teach them. Students who refuse to give up and fight through the confusion give me great joy. When my students from last year remind me of all I've taught them, I find more joy.

When the friendships I have developed with parents in the past stay true as the kids grow older, I find joy. Just recently, I was at the football game and ran into lots of parents. Hugs, well-wishes and lots of "I love you"s were given. This gives me great joy. I want to make a difference.

## **What is your favorite class to teach? Why?**

I love it all.

I love teaching math, because there are so many ways to solve a problem, and everyone can do it differently.

I love teaching reading, because it involves our written language and how we learn. I love to read, and I can share that passion with my students.

I love history, because I believe we have to know where we come from in order to understand where we are going.

I love science, because it causes students to question and wonder. It has a process, and students can make predictions and see the outcome.

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

## **change?**

It would be great if class sizes were smaller. So many children require individual attention in learning, and I would love not to be spread so thin.

## **How has your place in education or your perspective on education changed?**

I am reminded frequently what a privilege it is to be able to do what I love. Teaching is hard.

The hours required to make my classroom a success: I work over 50 hours a week to make sure I have covered all my bases and to think outside of the box. I used to think teachers worked 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Little did I know.

## **How do you expect education to change in the next 10 to 20 years?**

I am scared for what changes may be brought to the public school system. As more liberals attempt to include their agenda into sexual education and in my classroom—through history lessons, moral codes and doctrines—I need to know how to protect my students and families. I need to give my parents the resources to stand against what they don't believe in. I will continue to emulate Esther and take that stand.

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

In education, we teachers are doing our best to build up and encourage our students. I want parents to understand they are their child's first teacher. Whatever their children see and hear from their parents is how they actually view the world. Whatever experiences and opportunities they can provide only open more opportunities to access understanding for their child.

Also, as a teacher, I need their support. We are a team, and we must stand

united.

## **About Baptists**

### **Why are you Baptist?**

I believe in the Baptist Faith and Message. I believe the Bible is the true and holy word of God. I believe Jesus was immersed fully by John the Baptist as a sign that when we confess our sins and surrender to Jesus, we are dead in our trespasses and are raised to life in him.

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

I'm sure this is not exclusive to Baptists, but we are seeing an aging population of devout servants. The upcoming generation—as far as what I can see—struggles with commitment and serving. Sports and community are huge, but they get too tired for church.

If we don't teach our children how much we need Jesus and our local church, we are showing them how to live without him and his church.

## **About Tammy**

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

Dr. Poppy Airhart was my principal for five years at McWhorter Elementary School in Mesquite. She gave me opportunities to achieve, succeed and fail. She encouraged me when I needed it and chewed me out when I needed it. She has shaped me more than she may realize.

I learned how to control my responses, how to troubleshoot a parent and

situations at school, how to disaggregate data and teach to my weaknesses. Because of Dr. Airhart, I am strong, confident and humble. She encouraged me to teach others and lead other teachers. I am forever grateful.

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

As an educator, I have had the same schedule as my son. I am aware of what trends are being implemented and laws are being passed.

As a parent, I hold my students to the same standards as I hold my own son. I have been able to counsel parents about education and share my own experiences as a wife and mom.

Because of my certifications and what I have taught, my son likes that I can help him with his homework from time to time.

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

One of my favorite books is Esther. She was a queen on a mission. She went against the customs and stood up for her people. She was in that position for "such a time as this."

I believe I am in my position for such a time as this. My students could be hungry, hurting, lonely or scared. I've had kids hide in the dark, eat crayons, use solar lamps in the house because the electricity was off, and more.

Having a teacher tell you she loves you, encourages you and helps provide resources for you really could change a child's life. This love and help can provide hope. Esther gave hope to her people. It's my job to give hope to mine.