



SAN FELIPE DEL RIO CISD

February 4, 2021

SFDR CISD TEACHER SELECTED AS TEXAS STATE FARM® TEACHER ASSIST WINNER

It did not take long for great and exciting news to travel fast inside our SFDR CISD community. This week, the State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company (State Farm®), revealed that one of our very own teachers, Vanessa James-Hjelmstad, a 5th grade teacher at the Roberto “Bobby” Barrera Elementary STEM Magnet School, was among 40 teachers across the state selected to receive the Texas State Farm® Teacher Assist Grant.

In the press release issued by State Farm®, the Texas State Farm® Teacher Assist Program aims to help teachers with adapting their teaching methods to meet the challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in unique and creative ways. In January, the company asked Texas teachers to share their teaching ideas for an opportunity to be selected to receive a grant. To boost their efforts, the State Farm® Teacher Assist Program announced that if their innovative idea is selected, \$2,500 would be awarded to their school.

So, what is Ms. James-Hjelmstad’s award-winning project? “Life Hacks 101 is a modern take on home economics that will allow students to apply their learning from the classroom to their everyday lives at home”, explained James-Hjelmstad. “This can be achieved through things like reading a procedural text while baking, growing their own garden and composting, and learning basic sewing skills. My Life Hackers will partake in a journey of self-discovery, be confronted with real-world monster obstacles, and reach fulfillment in acquiring ways to turn a problem into a solution. We will discuss how everyone is able to do more to reach self-sufficiency and confidence in their young lives.”

“As a company, we have a long history of working with teachers, educators, and students across the country. We are heartened by the immense response received from teachers sharing their solutions to

overcoming challenges,” said Annette Martinez, State Farm Senior Vice President. “Congratulations to the winners. We are proud to support you and help you reach your goals!”

James-Hjelmstad states that her motive for submitting the grant was to give our technology driven students lifelong survival skills in a fun, student-led environment. “I wanted to provide opportunities to my students that cover topics that may be considered a lost art in today’s technological society. By leading students in “Life Hacks 101,” I envision they will gain independence and confidence in learning to problem solve.” James-Hjelmstad attributes her idea to her favorite early middle school class – Home Economics. “There, I got my first taste of independence and reveled in the idea of not needing to ask mom and dad for everything. I thought about how fun it would be for students to learn those types of concepts with a modern twist and for me to be able to teach them, with the help of my colleagues.”

Ms. James-Hjelmstad currently works at the Roberto “Bobby” Barrera Elementary STEM Magnet School, which recently earned the Purple Star Designation by the Texas Education Agency for their work in assisting military-connected families last November. “I hope that one day the students that participate look back and remember one or more skills from their time learning life hacks with me. I still remember how to sew on a button from that time in my life and I’ve used that skill more than I expected. My wish is for this program to be fruitful through student’s delight in learning survival skills both successfully and independently. Students may even spark an inkling of joy when acquiring new skills that will help drive their choices for a future career.”

