



OUR

# Promise FEATURES

Integrity - Perseverance - Inclusivity - Innovation - Excellence



## Fabiola Zapien: Bolivia's Dreamer to Grayson's Difference-Maker

*For this month's Promise Feature, we visited Grayson paraeducator Fabiola Zapien, whose dream of coming to the United States from Bolivia became a lifelong commitment to helping students reach their own goals. Read how her story of perseverance and joy inspires everyone across the Grayson campus.*

### Identifying with her students

Each morning at Grayson, you will find paraeducator Fabiola Zapien greeting students with a smile as she supervises the playground. After the bell rings, she moves into the classroom to support students in English Language Arts and math.

For seven years, she has worked with special education students, helping them build confidence and skills that will carry them forward. Because Grayson is a dual-language school, Fabiola's bilingual skills are essential. Whether she is explaining a lesson in Spanish or helping a student in English, she connects with them in a way that feels natural and supportive.

"I moved to the United States from Bolivia in 2004 with no English at all," she said. "So I identify with these kids."

Fabiola's path to becoming a paraeducator began with her own children. When her son began speech therapy, she started volunteering at his school in Newman, helping in the classroom and on the playground.

"One of the teachers told me, 'I see you as a para,'" she recalled. That encouragement motivated her to enroll in English as a Second Language classes, where she found two mentors, including Patterson High School teacher Denise Sullivan, who pushed her to pursue her goals. Their guidance gave her the confidence to continue her education, and she later enrolled at Merced College to study early childhood education, with plans to complete her associate degree next year.



Fabiola supports students from first through sixth grade in small groups using corrective reading programs. Every child she works with has different goals, and she takes joy in helping them meet those milestones so they can transition into general education.

"These kids remind me of when I first came to this country," she said. "They motivate me, and I always tell them, 'If I could, you can.'"

Growing up in Bolivia, Fabiola watched Full House and was captivated by the image of the Golden Gate Bridge.

"When I was ten years old, I told everyone that one day I would live in that country and cross that bridge," she said. "Everyone laughed at me, but I never gave up."

Years later, she did exactly that, and now every year on her birthday, she and her family walk across the Golden Gate Bridge to celebrate the dream becoming a reality.

That same message of determination is something she also shares at home. "One of my biggest dreams growing up was to be a cheerleader," she said. "Unfortunately, I wasn't able to fulfill that dream, but my daughter has accomplished her dream of being a cheerleader for the past eleven years. She proudly stands as an All-American."

At Grayson, Fabiola brings that same spirit of hope and perseverance to her students. She reminds them that dreams are possible with hard work and determination.

"If you really want something and you are persistent, you will get it," she tells them.

Beyond the classroom, Fabiola is deeply involved in school life. Every Christmas, she and her husband dress up as Santa and Mrs. Claus, bringing gifts to every student and staff member. They also help celebrate El Día del Niño, continuing traditions that spread joy and connection across the Grayson campus.

"This school is my second home," Fabiola said. "I love to make the students smile. That is what makes me happiest."