

# James Hart's Dawn Spisak ends 35-year teaching career

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For 18 years, Dawn Spisak has shared another world with James Hart School students through her Spanish language classes. She said "adios" to her students and the teaching profession. She'd been in front of a classroom for 35 years.

At James Hart, Spisak used games, songs and videos to enhance her teaching and keep eighth graders engaged in their introduction to the language and the cultures where Spanish is the first language.

"It's not always easy, but I do try to make it fun," she said. "I have them playing games and doing readings, and I even have some kids now that they text in Spanish," which she said shows their interest and abilities in the language.

By the end of the year, the Hart students have mastered the first course of Spanish and advance to Level 2 in high school.

James Hart students have a foundation to build on at Homewood-Flossmoor High School, and Spisak knows some of her students have gone on to take Spanish all four years advancing to Spanish 5 as seniors.



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

Retiring Spanish teacher Dawn Spisak, seated, enjoys spending time with James Hart 8th graders, from left, Brynn Quirke, Alex Cordero, Addi Woodward, Akila Smith, Isabelle Order and Kylie Blasgen.

"That makes me very proud," she said.

Spisak, who grew up in Thornton, got a degree in business education from Eastern Illinois University in 1986 and taught business law and computers at Lake Central High School in St. John, Indiana, for many years.

"After teaching high school, I thought I might want to try teaching junior high school. I came to James Hart School be-

cause of its high expectations both in school and from the community," she said. She taught technology at Hart, went back and earned a minor in Spanish from Purdue University and began teaching eighth grade Spanish.

The most trying experience of her career was teaching during the pandemic.

"I think it's one of the most difficult teaching years I've ever experienced. I know how difficult it was for students

to learn over a computer and teaching was also a challenge," Spisak said.

"It's very, very challenging because you don't have that interaction. Here I can say turn to your partner and ask them this, this and this. You have to get their processing and their thinking going because we flip (from English to Spanish) and so you can do that in a classroom more naturally because you're constantly saying something in Spanish. They don't need to think about it. On the computer it's very challenging to teach a foreign language because you don't have that interaction," she explained.

"We all survived but I couldn't wait to return back to school to be in the classroom teaching students again. How I missed it!" When District 153 reopened in March 2021 after a one-year shutdown, Spisak said she volunteered to return.

Spisak has loved her teaching career and encourages others into the profession.

"Become that teacher you remember that had a positive impact in your life. Always be proud of your work and profession. I've learned so much in my 35 years of teaching and I wouldn't change my career choice," Spisak said.

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