

# The News



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## PA teacher wins 'Best of Texas'

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— By David Ball

The News staff writer

Mary Lathan is not exaggerating when she said she has spent her entire life at Lincoln High School, now Memorial 9th Grade Center.

"My mother was pregnant with me when she taught here. I've been at Lincoln all my life. The students would baby-sit me while my mother graded papers. I originally didn't want to be a teacher, but I came back," Lathan said.

And with the exception of teaching a year at Austin Middle School and four years at Thomas Jefferson High School, she has spent the last 28 years of her teaching career at either Lincoln or Memorial 9th Grade. As a result of that experience and dedication, Lathan was honored with a Communities in School Best of Texas Award.

She received a trophy, a banner, a certificate and a book titled "The Last Dropout" by Bill Milliken at the ceremony in Austin.

"CIS is now under the umbrella of the Texas Education Agency and it adds to the credibility of the organization itself," she said. "I was very surprised to be nominated." Lathan said she was even more surprised to be awarded.

Lathan believes students tell their teachers about things going on in their lives more than they do to other adults.

"I know when they don't feel well or something is wrong. When the child has a problem, they open up," she said. "We need to become an advocate for the children and know where to send the kid if they have like a physical problem and pair them up with the proper source. Parents can't get off work all the time and CIS can act as a go-between.

"Without assistance, the student can become a problem; a statistic and then we wonder what happened."

CIS describes itself as a dropout prevention program whose goal is keeping Texas youth in school and better prepared for a post-secondary education.

Lathan teaches English and some of the projects her students are working on are a genealogy project and their first annual literary magazine.

The magazine features photographs, drawings, poetry and narratives.

"This is where it all begins (in the 9th grade). It's about the kids, not us," she said.

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Photos



David Ball/The News Mary Lathan, a Memorial 9th Grade Center English teacher, recently won the Communities in Schools Best of Texas Award for dropout prevention. She and her students are standing in front a wall with samples of their new literary magazine. From left, Adrian Zepeda, Mary Lathan, Ngan Le, Brittany Francis and Raven Ballou. The Port Arthur News