

As a very shy student, I enrolled in the Freshman Success Bridge Courses in the fall of 2008 at VAST Academy. These courses prepare students to take mainstream courses at Houston Community College. Once enrolled, I realized that I needed additional help and I enrolled as a full-time student in VAST Academy seeking an Office Skills Certificate. While attending VAST Academy, my self-confidence grew and I began to realize that everyone here (on earth) has a purpose. Once I realized that, I became a motivator for VAST Academy students transitioning from high school to college - life like myself my self-esteem began to blossom.

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While attending VAST Academy, I expressed an interest in childcare and after graduating in spring of 2010, I began looking for a job in that field. My interest in this area developed at a young age while babysitting my little cousins; however, I knew this was the path for me for sure once I completed my 200 hour VAST Academy required internship with Texas Children’s Hospital in 2010. While I was looking for a job, Sue Moraska, Director of VAST Academy, received a phone call from the Rise School about a

full-time Teacher Assistant position and referred me for an interview. The Rise School is the first and only school dedicated to early education of infants, toddlers, and pre-school children with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities in an integrated environment. I was determined to get the job, and I did. I have worked at The Rise School for almost 3 years now.



Vanessa Martinez

Last year, all Teacher Assistants at the Rise School had the opportunity to pursue a Child Development Associate Certificate. I knew I would embrace this challenge. I sacrificed every other Saturday from 8:00 am – 3:00 pm until I achieved 120 hours, the requirement for my CDA. When asked about this achievement, I proudly state, “The tortoise won the race”. My desire to learn something new every day has taken me to new heights and I find myself motivating my co-workers and mentoring student interns. After describing me as a compassionate individual with a calm spirit, the Executive Director of The Rise School, Jane Stailey proclaims that, “those who benefit most from Vanessa being an employee are definitely the staff”!