

Chicken Soup for *Friendswood ISD*

The day was August 31, 2020. I opened my laptop and prepared for the first day of a very different school year. I was slightly nervous but mostly excited to see an entire screen of new faces. As I watched the 34 second-graders looking back at me, I couldn't help but think about a similar experience I'd had six years earlier.

In 2014, I had just graduated from college. My whole life, I had lived in a small town in Pennsylvania but I felt something was calling me elsewhere. I did not know where I would go or what I would do, but I knew it was time to leave. I sent out my application all over the country, hoping to land a teaching job I would love (I certainly knew it would take a very special place to make me leave my friends and family behind). Then one morning in June, I was given that chance.

In my inbox, there was an email from a small school south of Houston called Cline Elementary. They wanted to set up a Skype interview with me. Ecstatic and jittery all at once, I accepted. On the other side of my computer, Barry Clifford, Tess James, Christine Lyles, and some now-retired teachers smiled at me while discussing my potential career at Cline. Though I should have been scared out of my mind, there was a sense of peace throughout the conversation that led me to believe that this may be my "special place." When the interview ended, I called my mom.

"This is it. It felt right. It felt like family. It felt like home," I told her.

A few days later, I was offered the job. I accepted and made the 1,591-mile journey to my new home, to my new life...

Now, here I was all these years later being asked to step out of my comfort zone again and start the school year as a virtual teacher. I knew from that moment of reflection that if I was going to provide my students with one thing it was going to be that same relationship and feeling that I felt through the screen. That day, we read the story "Our Class is a Family." We discussed how family is not always your relatives, how family accepts you for who you are, how family loves and cares for you no matter what. That is what I try to show my students every day; our classroom is a safe place to be yourself, make mistakes, and know you are a part of our special family.

Cline Elementary gave me a new family through a video call, and that family has only continued to grow every day since.

-Brittany Bocan, Cline teacher