



By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Melissa Wallin moved through her third grade classroom Monday, dispensing advice and coffee filters as one of her students celebrated a birthday. The coffee filters were to hold the snacks.

The advice was offered with humor and gentleness.

Wallin just began her first year as a teacher at Chase County Schools (CCS). She previously taught second grade at McCook Elementary for two years.

The Texas native completed a Bachelor of Science degree in human development and family studies at Texas Tech University in 2002. She then obtained an additional degree in early childhood studies from the same school in 2004.

Presently, she is working on a Masters degree in special education.

Wallin became interested in working with special needs children early in her career. She was a summer camp counselor and tutor for dyslexic children, then autistic children during five summers at Lubbock (Texas) Independent School District.

That interest came partially from her babysitting experiences with a family that had three special needs children. In addition, following college she was a nanny for a family that had an autistic son.

After receiving her degree in early childhood education, Wallin taught second, third and fourth grades at Hardwick Elementary School in Lubbock, Texas. At the same time she was providing in-home service to autistic children based on their individual education plan through Lubbock Independent School District.

She also taught third grade for one year at Eden Park Academy in Austin, Texas from 2009-10. Asked why she moved from teaching special education to the regular classroom, Wallin said, "I always wanted to do both. I didn't choose one or the other. Special education is precious to me."

She hopes to teach her class a love for books and to enjoy reading. Wallin said she wasn't much of a reader herself until four or five years ago. Now she likes to spend the summer reading.

Her other hobby is running. She didn't begin to run until she moved to Nebraska, and has now run the Bolder Boulder and plans to run a half marathon in Dallas, Texas in December.

Wallin said she strives for the same goal every year in her classroom. "I want them to feel safe in here. I don't want them to think they can't ask questions.

"I want to build relationships. If you don't have that they won't work for you," she said.

Wallin said she and husband Chad, who have been married one year, have found everyone to be welcoming and friendly, especially at school, where they don't hesitate to help her settle in.

They recently moved to west of Imperial from Palisade.

