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Austin teacher wins H-E-B lifetime achievement award

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AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

A fourth-grade teacher known for ending every Friday by playing her guitar and singing popular folk songs in the hallway with students won the elementary school lifetime achievement award Sunday as part of the annual H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards.

Elaine Leibick, a teacher for 34 years who teaches at Highland Park Elementary School in West Austin, was the contest's sole Central Texas winner, receiving \$25,000 in cash as well as \$25,000 for her school.

Leibick also is known for deftly helping students struggling with math and trying new techniques in the class, said Kate Rogers, H-E-B's vice president of corporate communications. For example, Leibick would have students use catalogues to pretend to shop for their own bedroom furnishings or plan out the cost of dinner and a movie with their families.

In March, Leibick was one of seven Central Texas educators who were named finalists for the year's awards, the largest monetary awards program for educators in Texas.

Leibick and the four other Central Texas teachers advanced to the finals: Zoila Cardenas of Mitchell Elementary in Georgetown, Chad Springer of Legacy Early College High School in Taylor, Rachael Brunson of Great Oaks Elementary in Round Rock and Angela Buckingham of Reagan High in Austin. Each won \$1,000 for themselves and \$1,000 for their districts.

Blaine Helwig, principal of Graham Elementary School in Austin, and Lisa Walls, principal of Chapa Middle School in Hays County, were the principal finalists and received \$1,000 for themselves and \$2,500 for their schools.