



Lynden Middle School

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To Whom It May Concern,

With great privilege and honor I write this letter on behalf of Suzie Cartagena. I've worked with Suzie within incredibly diverse classrooms. During this time Suzie has demonstrated the ability to work effectively with students of any need resulting in remarkable levels of student achievement and success.

Suzie is an excellent listener, communicator and collaborator, always one step ahead of the game concerning the education of our students. She's extremely proactive making time to discuss differentiated approaches that allow students to make meaningful connections to content. Suzie's insight allows me to see the whole child to provide instruction and scaffolding that meets their learning needs. I've specifically seen dramatic increases with our Hispanic student population. In past years I've observed minimal progress for ELL Level II and III students, despite providing accommodations and modifications. Since Suzie's arrival, I've observed this same population of students consistently working at or beyond grade level standard within Language Arts and History. Suzie possesses the ability to connect with kids and challenge them to take advantage of their educational opportunities. She empowers them to work hard each day to see what they are capable of, she offers constant praise and compels these kids to reflect upon current family circumstances to understand what they want out of life. 7th grade science teacher, Lexi MacNevin states, "I feel privileged to teach with Susie. Every day she demonstrates to her students that she cares, by encouraging them and providing supports so they know how to ask for help from their peers and their teachers. She gives them her time, her attention and she holds them accountable for their actions. Susie empowers students to become good students and advocate for themselves as they continue on in school. The community that she builds with these students is a huge reason they find success." Suzie's ability to listen to our students, relate to them and advocate on their behalf has improved their self-esteem and self-confidence, and growth mindset!

Suzie has been instrumental in assisting our Title I Interventionist set-up of English Language Acquisition for students that enter speaking only Spanish. Suzie provides one on one verbal discourse teaching basics such as colors, body parts, and greetings. Suzie practices pronunciation and spelling with these students, and communicates with teachers to determine appropriate accommodations. 7th grade math teacher, Nicole Medcalf says, "Suzie is an incredible educator working with these students. She has a way of being firm yet soft at the same time while maintaining high expectations for our students. I've been amazed by the increased confidence and levels of understanding our ELL students have achieved, which is the result of Suzie's ability to process instruction and determine differentiation that meets these students at their starting point. Suzie is irreplaceable!" The more difficult the student challenge, the higher Suzie sets the bar for providing support to ensure student success!

I've observed Suzie's presence go beyond the classroom. Suzie created a 7th grade Access class to monitor student work, grades and provide additional instruction to challenged ELL students who need more time to process. Suzie also set up an after school "Homework Help" program to provide more effective communication and support to meet the needs of our Hispanic students. I've observed Suzie multi-tasking, covering Language Arts, History, Math and Science, molding these students into a vibrant learning group. There are smiles and laughter, and an intensity and engagement that are hard to encourage after a long day of schoolwork. Her energy for learning is contagious as students can be seen helping each other, taking more ownership and responsibility for their work, and consequently, enjoying greater levels of academic success.

I consider Suzie's greatest accomplishment to be her professional leadership. Suzie leads by example going the extra mile to help other teachers. Suzie has helped several 7th grade teachers set up parent communication with Spanish-only speaking families. Suzie communicates needs for organization and homework signatures, and sets up parent teacher conferences to strengthen academic supports. Suzie has helped me to set up monthly parent meetings to assist parents in becoming more informed and supportive of their children's education. Suzie's ability to communicate effectively and build familial relationships allows me to experience greater teacher-parent communication and build upon an improved sense of trust and comfort that allows parents to approach myself and other school officials regarding various student services. Suzie's contributions to help strengthen relationships with family members are beyond measure.

Suzie Cartagena is in that rare 1% whose unprecedented impact is far reaching. Never have I observed someone with the passion, dedication and desire to serve a learning community as multi-dimensionally as she does.

Sincerely,

Dirk A. Denniston, 7th Grade Language Arts/History Teacher