



## Lynden Middle School

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It is my distinct honor to recommend Ms. Suzie Cartagena as the Washington State para-professional of the year. From the moment Suzie began working in our school, I noticed an immediate change in a large population of our kids. Suzie checks in with me daily to ask about the progress of students, how a kid is doing emotionally, or if a kid is struggling. She cares deeply about our kids. She has taken on the role of a stand-in parent to many of our kids that need an extra adult in their life that cares. The kids know she is there for them.

One of the most outstanding moments with Suzie was our first Spanish speaking open house. Before Suzie worked at LMS, our school had a gap in our outreach for our ELL parents. Suzie took initiative to invite, welcome, and successfully communicate with our Spanish speaking population, comprising over 100 individuals. Suzie helped plan and continues to lead meetings for our Spanish speaking families. These include dinners, teacher/parent nights, and technology instruction for the parents. It was clear, at the first open house, that Suzie had a connection with many of the families. She is warm, welcoming, and helps them not only overcome the language barrier that many of them face when trying to communicate with the school, but she also helps walk them through our online grading system.

Suzie takes the initiative with students. She continually monitors progress of our students and plans interventions to get them back on track. Recently, there was a student who was struggling in multiple classes. Suzie approached me with multiple ideas to help get this kid back on track. She proposed schedule changes, alternative interventions, and additional help after school. She is currently working with the kid to find ways to motivate him to care about his education. She works tirelessly to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners.

I think one of Suzie's greatest strengths is her ability to collaborate with teachers, students, parents, and administrators. I hear the conversations she has in the halls with teachers, offering her insight, and asking how to better meet the needs of our students. I see the way she interacts with the students. They have an admiration and respect for her that not many adults can claim. When she works with kids, she is continually balancing that fine line between firm and kind that makes for an amazing educator. I have heard students express that Suzie is the reason they care about their education. She cared for them until they started to see why it was important.

Another way Suzie impresses me is her constant positive energy. She brings a positive vibe to our building. Her laughter and joy ring through the hallways each and every day. Her smile is contagious. She is passionate about what she does every day and you can tell, through her every action, that she is firmly devoted to educating our kids.

I wish all schools, all students, were lucky enough to have a Suzie working with and for them. She is an amazing coworker, educator, and all-in-all a phenomenal person to have the pleasure of knowing. She rises above any and all circumstances and shines her positive light everywhere she goes.

Thank you,

Kristine A. Nugent-Ohls, NBC T  
7th Grade Language Arts/History