

Dear NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award Committee,

April 10, 2014

I am writing to support Blair Perzentka for the NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award. Blair is in her fourth year as a high school English teacher at Marshall High School. During that time she has dedicated her passion and energy to creating a freshman English experience that supports student learning through relevant and engaging curriculum, strong student relationships, and solid communication strategies with both parents and students. All of this leads to successful student learning.

When Blair joined the Marshall High School English team in 2010, she found a curriculum in place that hadn't been updated since the early 80's. I know this, because I went to high school in Marshall in the early 80's and my daughter, now a senior, was bringing home worksheets that I had completed when I was there. Blair gradually incorporated new strategies, practices, and teen -relevant units of study that hook students and keep them engaged in learning. A few examples of this include: a spoken word unit, an updated Romeo and Juliet unit, and a Choice Books unit.

Each of the new units of study incorporates important standards and expectations for the students including reading, writing, speaking, and grammar. It's just that Blair figures out how to make that hard work for learning interesting and engaging. Instead of doing a traditional poetry unit, the students listen to YouTube videos of Spoken Word poetry first. This hooks them. Blair shares some more traditional poetry embedded in the unit, and expects students to write and share their own poetry. She also models the risk-taking necessary by sharing her personal writing. This helps students get to know and trust her.

The Romeo and Juliet unit also incorporates lots of reading, writing, speaking, and language instruction. Students compare contemporary tragedies with the classic. They learn to read and understand the Shakespearean language, as well as understanding the structure of tragedy. They make connections with their personal romantic relationships and have conversations about how their lives today might be similar or different from Romeo and Juliet.

After exposing students to a couple of classic novels early in the school year, Blair breaks things up by offering choice books around a theme. Students get to have some say in the fiction and nonfiction that they read and then use a literature circle type structure to have collaborative conversations. Blair uses this unit as an opportunity to teach text structure, literary device, and group dialogue protocols. Students do a ton of writing and Blair gives them specific feedback for improvement using Google Docs. She isn't an assign and grade teacher. She supports students through projects and works hard to make sure they all learn and feel successful. She also has the students discuss via blogs. In this low-threat environment more students feel confident in participating in the conversation.

As a parent, this is what I value most about Blair Perzentka. She reaches out to students. Not just the students who walk into her classroom already confident in their English skills. She prods and cajoles even the most reluctant students into writing, and reading, and speaking. And the students know that she does this because she cares. She doesn't play "Gotcha" with them. She doesn't try to "teach them a lesson" by letting them fail. She tries to teach them that they can succeed when they try. The work is about learning, not grading, and it shows in the results.

Blair supports student learning. She communicates in advance all of the assignments that will be due in the quarter. The students know exactly what the expectations are, because they get a rubric for every assignment. Blair teaches them the strategies and skills they need to know to be successful. She doesn't assume that they already know it. She jokes around, tells stories, and has extremely high expectations. Then she helps every child reach for those expectations. This, to me, is what excellence in teaching is. My son is in Blair's class this year, and he is learning so much from her. He is writing and reading all of the time. He talks about the class debates and Socratic seminars. He shares his opinions and argues his point. He can't wait to go to English class and that is because he has a teacher who cares. And that is why Blair Perzentka deserves to receive the NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo Ziegler

Marshall High School Parent



April 14th, 2014

To Whom it May Concern:

I would like to highly recommend Blair Perzentka for NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award. I have served as Blair's direct supervisor for the past four years at Marshall High School. Her position in that time has included teaching sections of English 9, English Support, College Reading and Writing and coordinating our GEDO #2 program. Blair also takes on additional responsibilities by supporting middle school students in a homework club and serving as an assistant director in our drama productions. Blair is very focused on providing students with meaningful learning activities that engage and challenge them at their own level which produces outstanding results each year.

Informal and formal observations of Blair's classroom consistently show a high level of engagement throughout all students. This is one of the only places in the high school where you will find students working on different tasks that were specifically designed by Blair based upon assessment data and student choice. She has worked hard to update the curriculum to provide more contemporary, high interest fiction and nonfiction literature choices for students. She also takes classic literature and modernizes it through her delivery. An example would include having the students rewrite a passage from Romeo and Juliet between two characters as if they were texting each other. This pushes students to internalize the reading and translate into their own language and reality which deepens their understanding of the material.

Blair has taken on some of our structural transformations with a view that they are opportunities of growth and improvement. We have transitioned to a modified block schedule from an eight period day. Blair has been aggressively seeking out better lesson plans to meet the needs of the students. One example would be the incorporation of socratic seminars to foster better student discussion and interaction. When a teacher suggests that freshmen are not capable of high level thinking or discussion, I will immediately point them to Blair's classroom. Blair has also embraced our 1:1 laptop initiative and has served as a leader through her exemplary use of the Google Calendar as a tool for communicating with students, support staff and parents. Blair has also been effective in her use of blogs and other Google Apps to engage students in meaningful ways.

Blair has been an outstanding addition to our staff and has raised the level of achievement by our staff. As the only English 9 teacher in the building, she has a dramatic impact on our EXPLORE and PLAN data. Student data has shown a continued increase in their growth while in her class and consistently show gains that are much greater than the ACT expected growth. Blair is a highly effective English teacher which is why I would like to recommend her for this recognition.

Sincerely,



Brian Sniff

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