

# NORTHWESTERN REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

BARKHAMSTED, COLEBROOK, NEW HARTFORD and NORFOLK

## *Northwestern Regional High School Core Values and Beliefs*

*Northwestern Regional High School fosters academic and personal excellence in every student. In partnership with families and communities, we create a safe learning environment dedicated to developing the skills of lifelong learning. Our dynamic and challenging educational program prepares individuals to respect diversity and become responsible citizens in a rapidly evolving global environment.*



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To Whom It May Concern,

Once in a while, we get the privilege to mentor someone who is a natural teacher. I have had that privilege of working as a cooperating teacher with Katie Serafini at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year at Northwestern Regional High School. She is teaching a full five course load composed of four sophomore classes (one co-taught general, two college preparatory, and one honors) and a senior honors writing class. Katie's confidence and ease in the classroom far surpasses many veteran teachers'. With her enthusiasm for her students and English, her creativity and ability to differentiate instruction, and her dedication to becoming the best teacher she can be for her students, Katie creates a classroom environment where students are actively engaged in learning.

Unlike many teacher candidates and beginning teachers, Katie exudes confidence in front of her students. Although she assures me that she is nervous, anyone observing her classroom would never suspect it. She articulates her instructions and objectives clearly. She handles routines and transitions with ease and uses bell work not only to tie into the daily lesson but also to get her classes in the habit of coming in and settling down to work. Thus, her students are focused and ready to go after the second bell rings.

Katie's confidence helped her set a clear tone at the beginning of the year when she articulated her expectations to the students. She laid out three rules for them: respect yourself, respect others, and respect your environment. Katie sets the example for those rules. She shows her students respect as she builds up their achievements and strengths through verbal praise, positive emails and phone calls home, and her "brag wall" for student work. Even when students try her patience, she never resorts to sarcasm. Instead, she proactively seeks to find out what is bothering them before they can act out whatever frustrations they are bringing into the classroom. During hall duty before homeroom, she checks on people who she knows are having issues outside of school. While she empathizes with them, she also lets them know that she still expects them to come to class willing to work.

One reason Katie has reached so many learners is her enthusiasm for English and her students. She exudes passion for literature and writing and when she is fired up, so are her classes. It is not unusual for her to break into song to express her excitement. Katie does not like a quiet classroom and has established that silence and lack of participation are not options. She wants to hear everyone's input. For Katie, the biggest thrill is watching students make connections and meaning in texts. In her words, it is "magic." She feeds off each class's successes, big and small, and channels that energy back into her lessons. Her classroom contains a lot of positive, constructive energy.

The biggest reasons for Katie's success are her creativity and ability to differentiate instruction. She varies activities from day to day as well as the level of difficulty within her assignments to reach the needs of all students. For

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- Global awareness
- A safe learning environment
- The pursuit of personal excellence in all aspects of our lives
- Partnership with families and communities

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example, she has used fishbowls, jigsaws, the open mind, story boards, and stations to name a few of the activities. In addition, she has incorporated blogs and You Tube videos of Grammar Rock into the curriculum. These techniques have helped her reach the needs of different styles of learners. Even within these activities she creates more options to help students of differing ability levels to meet with success. For example, when she uses cooperative groups, she breaks the students up based on ability (although she makes it look random) and gives the more literal students a topic that they will be able to discuss while the students who are able to make inferences receive more abstract topics. When she reconfigures the groups in a jigsaw or has one person from each group report to the rest of the class, everyone receives all of the information, both literal and abstract. Other activities, like her stations, require all students to perform all of the tasks which vary in degree of difficulty moving from the literal to the abstract. These activities not only keep Katie's students actively engaged in learning, but they also make class, in the students' words, "fun." Furthermore, no matter what exercise she uses to engage her classes, her academic standards remain high. Even when she assigns something creative, like an artistic representation of a theme or image in a novel, Katie requires her students to explain their thinking in writing. The depth of each person's explanation becomes a large factor in his or her grade.

Finally, Katie's desire to be the best teacher she can be *for her students* drives her to improve her teaching. When we conference, she wants to make sure she teaches the important concepts because, in her words: "I don't want to mess up for them." She understands that her students' futures are at stake. Thus, she reflects on her lessons and pushes herself to improve so that her students will learn and be challenged.

Purposeful planning and execution of lessons (both of which Katie excels at) do not, in and of themselves, make a good educator. However, when these skills are combined with compassion for kids, enthusiasm and knowledge of subject matter, and a desire to truly get to know students and meet their individual and intellectual needs, you have a great teacher. Katie Serafini is that teacher. No matter how much I write, I cannot express the depth to which Katie has reached students nor how much she has earned my respect. What I can say is that I regret that we do not have a full or part time position to offer her. Therefore, it is without reservation that I recommend Katie Serafini to your school.

Sincerely,

Sarah Machowski

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