



Port Towns Elementary
Weekly Focus Bulletin
Week of September 2, 2013

Dear Port Towns Staff,

"If your actions in the classroom inspire children to achieve more, question more, and dream more, you are indeed worthy of the title 'Teacher.'" - Robert John Meehan

When I saw this quote I immediately connected it to a lesson I saw taught in Mr. Topel's science class last week. When I walked in, students had the following supplies on their tables: spaghetti noodles, pennies, large paper clips and the bottom portion of a Styrofoam cup. Mr. Topel stated to the students that they were to work together as a group to design an experiment that would allow them to determine how many grams it would take to break a spaghetti noodle. He shared with students the fact that pennies don't weigh the same depending on the year they were made. He shared just a few other relevant facts and then turned them loose. No further directions, no insight for how to begin, etc. Did students struggle? Yes, but they struggled in a good way. The struggle forced discussion in their groups about how to go about testing this. How could they get their spaghetti noodle to stay on the Styrofoam cup while they put pennies or paper clips on it? What would the variables be? Students engaged in great discussion while Mr. Topel stepped out of the role of teacher and simply walked around the room guiding students. Students were eager, engaged, smiling and having productive conversation. I stood there in his classroom saying, "Aha, this is a true common core lesson filled with rigor, healthy discussion and students struggling." I also know that as students continue to be taught in this fashion in his classroom, the struggles will diminish because this is the new norm for them. I also knew in that moment, that he was truly a "teacher" in that his students would learn so much more utilizing this approach to teaching than they ever would with the teacher providing students with all the elements of an investigation and not allowing the struggle and student discussion to occur.

My challenge to all of you is to find ways to turn over the learning to the students as the above illustrates. I know that our natural instinct as teachers is to "step in and help" when we see students struggling with science, writing, math, reading, etc.

Think about how much more powerful it is for them to wrestle with learning a bit and then discover the outcome on their own. This is what true "Teaching" is all about. I look forward to getting into some more classrooms in the coming weeks and being able to share other examples of students achieving more, questioning more and dreaming more. We can do this!

Let's get ready for a wonderful week filled with rigorous Common Core instruction in each of our classrooms.

Thought for the Week:

"Teachers who love teaching, teach children to love learning." - Robert John Meehan

Have a fantastic week full of rich, rigorous instruction in each of our classrooms!

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my professional privilege to write this letter of recommendation regarding Mr. David Topel, an educator with the Prince George's County Public School System. As the former Principal of Cooper Lane Elementary in Prince George's County, I worked closely with Mr. Topel for the last six years. I have tremendous respect for his intellect, decision making abilities, communication skills and compassion for the community he serves.

Mr. Topel is an outstanding educator who exemplifies excellence. His teaching methods have produced knowledgeable and enthusiastic students. He consistently searches for ways to make his teaching more interesting and more informative. He spends a great deal of time and effort, arriving early each day, in planning his students' lessons and projects in order to approach the class time in an organized fashion. I have found him to be very cooperative and receptive when assigned special or extra assignments to enhance the teaching and learning of his students.

A review of Mr. Topel's evaluations for the past six years indicates that he continues to do an outstanding job. He was always innovative and dynamic in the classroom, infusing his students with tremendous motivation and instilling in them an appetite for the joys of learning. I consider Mr. Topel to be one of those extraordinary educators who always put forth a wholehearted effort with amazing results.

It is with the highest degree of confidence that I can assure you of his ability to meet the challenges with a clear vision and a high level of enthusiasm. I know he will be both a great asset to any organization and the community in which he will serve.

If I can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

LaVerne Wilson, Principal

July 09, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to provide an employment reference for Mr. David Topel. I have been acquainted with Mr. Topel since August of 2007 when I joined the staff of Cooper Lane Elementary as a first grade teacher. Over the years in my subsequent roles as Grade Level Chair, Reading Specialist, Testing Coordinator, and SFA (Success For All) Facilitator, I have become more familiar with Mr. Topel and knowledgeable of the impact he has had on the lives of his students, and his contribution to the educational community.

Mr. Topel is a dedicated educator who strives to meet the needs of all his students. He is a dependable individual who is committed to the well-being of his students. Mr. Topel consistently plans and implements lessons to engage students on all academic levels. He strives to maintain a standard of excellence and encourages students to do their personal best.

In addition to teaching fourth grade and sixth grade students, Mr. Topel served as Technology Coordinator and Media Specialist at Cooper Lane Elementary from 2006 to 2008. His technological acumen is unmatched. During this time, Mr. Topel educated students about technology and provided technological support to staff and administrators throughout the school.

He conducted professional development for staff on Excel and PowerPoint, created technology teams and trained students to handle minor hardware and application issues. Mr. Topel instituted a program to raffle donated laptops to honor roll students, quarterly. He also assumed responsibility for maintaining the school's **website** and for printing student award certificates. As a classroom teacher, Mr. Topel skillfully integrates technology into his lessons and takes the time to instruct students about many aspects of technology.

Mr. Topel's dedication and commitment to excellence are manifested by his membership on Cooper Lane Elementary TEDL team, as well as his membership in the International Reading Association and the International Society for Technology in Education. He, without fail, looks for innovative ways to engage students, broaden their horizons, and promote academic success.

Mr. Topel
Page Two

Mr. Topel's commitment to the education of children and the educational community is demonstrated daily through his actions. He is a dependable employee whose personal goal is to ensure that students receive a quality education. I recommend Mr. Topel for any position for which he applies.

Please feel free to contact me by telephone at (240) 383-7974 or by e-mail (shelia.carroll@pgcps.org), if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Shelia M. Carroll, Ph.D. National
Board Certified Teacher Reading
Specialist
Testing Coordinator
SFA Coordinator

Prince George's County Public Schools
Overlook Elementary
3298 Curtis Drive
Temple Hills, MD. 20748

July 15, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

It gives me great delight to write this letter of support for Mr. Dave Topel. I have had the unique pleasure of working with Mr. Topel as the former Mentor Teacher of Cooper Lane Academy.

Mr. Topel runs a well planned and well organized classroom. When I would enter his room, his fourth graders were focused and actively involved with the lesson at hand. He is, without doubt, one of the most effective influential intermediate teachers I have witnessed in my career.

Mr. Topel works hard to understand the needs of all of his students and consistently communicates his high expectations to them. He goes out of his way to help his students realize their potential and makes them feel as if they can accomplish anything.

I have observed terrific lessons of instruction taking place in Dave's classroom. I've noticed how he would always try to get his students to think critically about the topic or concept. His students were always engaged and on task as evidenced in his lesson design that integrated technology and performed based activities. Mr. Topel establishes and maintains an orderly environment that is conducive to learning and one that fosters cooperation and mutual respect.

Dave constantly plans for instruction. His purposeful lessons were clear, meaningful, and related to the students' prior knowledge and skill level. Ongoing assessment was evident in his classroom instruction. Mr. Topel's students are very fortunate to have him as their teacher.

Sincerely,
Sheila Perkins

Silver Spring, MD 20904
July 10, 2013

I am pleased to write this letter in support of David Topel. Dave is a teacher who serves as both a model and guide to the staff at Cooper Lane Elementary School.

I first met Dave ten years ago when I became the math resource teacher at Cooper Lane. Dave was teaching a self-contained fourth grade. Dave was a delight to observe and work with. He provided a classroom that was warm and inviting while displaying a clear understanding of the needs and interests of the children. He had a phenomenal rapport with the children. They all knew that he expected the most that they could give. Dave demonstrated both respect and love for the children, and the feeling is most definitely mutual. His program was always tailored to the individual needs of the children.

As Cooper Lane's Technology Teacher, Dave Topel provided support and guidance to staff members while instilling in the children an excitement for technology and its connection to learning. Classes worked in the computer lab each week. Dave provided the instruction and support that they needed to become technologically savvy for today's world. He also presented in-service training for staff members.

In both the classroom and computer lab, Mr. Topel presented lessons that involved students at all instructional levels. These lessons encouraged students to use higher order and critical thinking skills. Students were involved in meaningful learning activities at all times.

David Topel exemplifies the teacher we would all like to be as well as the teacher we wish all of our children could have. He is a true professional and an outstanding teacher.

Sincerely,



Marion Wilderman
Math Resource Teacher, Retired
Prince George's County Public Schools,