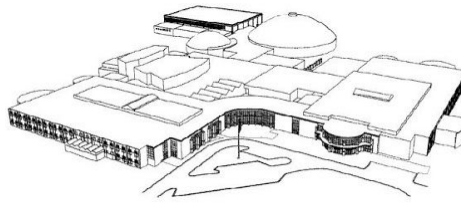


GLENBROOK SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL

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October 1, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I had the pleasure of getting to know Ella Durchin when she was enrolled in my sophomore English class in 2018, and our relationship has continued to develop since then. I can honestly say that — in my 18 years of teaching — Ella is one of the few students who truly changed the way I think about my practice, particularly with regard to writing instruction.

The year that Ella was in my class, I had decided to take a few more risks with creative writing opportunities for my students. Since I wanted those experiences to be meaningful to the students, I asked for their input, and Ella jumped at the chance to ask for what she wanted. I was so taken by her passionate interest in and willingness to talk about writing that I pursued further conversations with her, and each time she was eager to share her ideas — and each time I could feel myself reevaluating how I was teaching writing.

As an example, she gently and politely informed me that if teachers want students to ENJOY writing, they need to be given more chances to choose what they write about — that if we always and only ask the students to write about novels or topics that we choose, we can't honestly expect passion or earnest effort; students will care about their writing when they care about what they are writing about. She subtly suggested that even students who enjoy reading and writing aren't going to feel enthusiastic about every book or every five-paragraph essay.

As I type this, her advice seems so obvious, but to me in that moment of my career, it felt groundbreaking. And so, following those conversations with Ella, my philosophy about teaching writing and helping my students view themselves as writers completely shifted. Even now, years later, when I am coming up with new ideas for prompts or writing opportunities, I constantly ask myself, "What would Ella think of this?" (It's probably worth noting that I have noticed a remarkable difference in my students' writing since applying the "Ella philosophy" — both in enthusiasm and in quality. Taking her advice paid off.)

I can clearly picture the moment last year when Ella ran up to me in the hallway and proudly told me that her current English teacher told her she was an incredible writer. I was obviously thrilled to hear it and to see how much it meant to her, but what made that moment even more beautiful was knowing the role that Ella played in her own writing education. By telling me what she needed as a student, I was able to be a better teacher.

And perhaps that is what is most remarkable about Ella: her eagerness to expand her mind. She views writing and reading as essential to her growth as a person, not just as part of a grade or a single course. She is what we educators are envisioning when we describe "lifelong learners."

I am a better teacher today because of Ella, so it is my great honor to recommend Ella Durchin. I can say without hesitation that your institution would be lucky to have her.

Sincerely,

Annie Chiado