

# December 2020

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**Dear Friends,**

*"Learning is a humane process, and young humans look to those human elders with whom they are in daily contact for standards, for help, and as models. That is what teachers are for." --Ted Sizer*

Teachers are the heart of Parker. The teachers who choose to make Parker the place they make a difference in the world are special people: they are people who believe in students; they believe in equity; they believe that EVERY student can and will succeed.

This month we are spotlighting Tiffany Testa, a Division 2 MST teacher who has been teaching at Parker for the last 20 years.



**Why is Parker the place you choose to teach?**

During my formative first few years of teaching, I taught at

**Thoughts from Tiffany's students- past and present**

Most people don't have a

Tiff is so much more than a teacher. She is a mentor, advocate, and a dedicated

two different Coalition of Essential Schools schools and therefore the Ten Common Principles were ingrained in my early philosophy of learning and teaching. After three years of teaching at a more traditional school, I realized I could do more by banding with like-minded colleagues who shared similar beliefs and goals for learners. This is why I choose to work at Parker. I came to Parker in its fifth year of existence and my 6<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and aside from some time I took off to raise two boys, I have worked here since, calling Parker my school home!

### **How is it different teaching at a mission-driven school?**

As a charter school driven by its mission of the Ten Common Principles, I do not question the intent of impactful decisions whether large or small. I am confident a thoughtful process that puts the students' interest first is always the driver in everything we do. From the way we interact with students, to the priorities in our budget, our actions are screened through the principles. As the school has matured and developed, flexing with changing times and current best practice in education, our Principles have provided a grounding foundation which to guide us, forever keeping what we value as a constant. In doing so, Parker has remained true to its mission and to putting

teacher come into their lives that they remain in contact with 15 years after their high school graduation. I am one of those lucky people. Tiffany Testa is a mentor, leader, an incredibly passionate educator and someone who has created followership among her students and peers. Not only did I learn everything "science" from Tiff, she showed me the type of woman I wanted to become in my professional and personal life. As her student, I saw the passion she had for teaching and I wanted that same enthusiasm in my professional career. Some of my fondest memories from Middle/High school involve Tiffany; our trip to Costa Rica, C.O.W's, science experiments, completing service hours in her classroom, her endless supply of Hostess snacks and the way she treated me as a friend. I will be forever grateful for Tiff and the way she influenced my life in so many ways other than just being my science teacher.

***Kaitlin (Roop) Brinley, class of 2005***

One thing that stood out to me through my time working with Tiff was her caring nature and her ability to see the positive of every situation. She is very committed and passionate about helping students succeed and will do anything to make sure students are their best possible self. Tiff would take time out of her day and stay

supporter of every one of her students. Though it is fair to say she is an exemplary example of a teacher in her subject, her greatest assets are so much bigger. The way she helps her students to feel seen and cared about is so critical to the humanity of education. She is there for her students no matter how difficult things get. So if you go and ask her students, I remain confident that those who know Tiff as I do, will tell you the same. She is an absolute treasure for this community and I think I speak for all of us when saying how grateful we are for Tiff. Thank you so much for everything you give. And from me alone, thank you, for everything you've done for me. It means the world and I don't think I'll ever be able to put into words just how much it has meant to me.

**Joe P., Class of 2022**

Tiffany always made it exciting to learn. From fun experiments, her passion for science, and her clear explanations, to the student travel trips abroad she took us on! But more importantly, she was always there to support and make her students feel comfortable and cared for. That's where the real learning happened! **Katie (Gapinski) Nyren, Class of 2005**

students and learning first.

**Why is Common Principle #7, a Tone of Decency and Trust, important to your practice?**

That principle is one that guides my relationships with students. When we build a community of learning based on mutual respect, trust is built through the work. The idea that "I expect much from you and believe you can do it" and "I will be here to support whatever you need" is something I value and believe when it comes to students. When students see your commitment to their learning and interest in them as a whole person, they are able and willing to work through challenges that are inherent to meaningful complex work, high expectations, and building resiliency.

**How does having high expectations work its way into your classroom?**

Having high expectations lets students know you believe in them. Adolescence is a time where self-doubt can creep into students' mindsets. Keeping, communicating, and supporting high expectations of every student while providing the structures and supports for all students to reach these expectations, provides multiple opportunities for students to build skill, understanding, and an important resilience and confidence. All students are able to meet high expectations

late after school to help me and other students with our work or just talk about life. She is an honest, trustworthy and open person which reflected upon me and my relationship with her. She was always there to support me when I was going through rough times and never gave up on me. Ultimately she made me a better person and instilled some important qualities that helped to make me who I am today.

**Dom R., Class of 2021**

"I was struggling in my junior year of high school with grief having just lost my Dad. On top of that I was a very anxious person. Tiff stepped in to help me through this time. Every moment that I needed her she was there to help me. Later that year, I had the opportunity to go to the Bahamas with the school. I really wanted to go, but I had many anxieties about this trip, especially since it was my first time on a plane and out of the country. Tiff helped me push through my fear, be comfortable taking risks, and believe in myself. She listened and supported me every step of the way, despite everything else she had to keep track of on that trip. She made it a priority to make sure I was doing okay. That meant a lot to me and I'm very thankful that she helped me enjoy and learn on that trip." "Tiff is great when it comes to working with kids that have anxiety. That is a great skill

and when teachers act with this as their guide, and put belief into action, a supportive learning environment is created where students engage deeply with ideas and apply skills to meaningful learning. *"Every student, without exception, should be able to succeed well at something consequential."* ~ Ted Sizer

**How does Parker enable you to be the teacher you want to be?**

Parker fosters a growth mindset throughout the community- from student, to faculty, to families and staff. We are encouraged to look at all aspects of whatever we are doing- whether creating curriculum or developing a new Div 2 MST program. Questioning, analyzing, reflecting, and revising are all part of the process teachers are empowered to bravely engage in assuring alternative and effective ways teaching and learning might be considered.

for a teacher to have and it allows them to have a greater impact on their students. I remember a time when Tiff and I were walking on the beach and she stood next to me during a moment where I was feeling very anxious. She listened to everything I had to say and she reassured me. That made me feel a lot better and I always felt calmer after working through my anxiety with her.

**Sarah W., Class of 2021**

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