



LAKESIDE S C H O O L

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To Whom It May Concern:

I'm delighted to write on behalf of my colleague, Deborah Smith Johnston. She is an outstanding world history teacher and a generous pedagogue who has had, in my view, a greater impact on our department's overall quality and intentionality than any other individual. After less than a decade at Lakeside, Deb has created a lasting legacy among all of us who have had the good fortune to work alongside her. I recommend her enthusiastically and without reservation.

I first met Deb in the winter of 2008-2009, when I interviewed for a position at Lakeside Upper School. Throughout the rigorous hiring process, she was supportive, candid, and professional; as I joined the department, she made every effort to ensure that I and another new colleague got all the support we needed to ensure a smooth transition to Lakeside's classrooms. This included arranging grade-level curriculum development meetings, sharing the great wealth of her course materials and lesson plans, modeling exceptional world history teaching, and being ever-present with support, encouragement, and enthusiasm. Coming from an East Coast private school that did not foster the same generous spirit that Deb espoused as Department Chair, I was so grateful for the collegial environment that she created.

This kind of teaching environment directly benefits our students, because there is sharing of good teaching ideas and a sense of common purpose. As department chair, Deb's initiatives revealed her care and concern for her own students as well as the Lakeside student population as a whole. Five years ago, she launched the school's only assigned summer reading for our incoming freshmen so that all students, not just those progressing from the Lakeside Middle School, could have a firm footing in world history. She also created the school's first Model UN Day for the entire sophomore class, which is the culmination of months of research and preparation and is regarded by many students as among the most meaningful experiences they have at Lakeside.

Deb has created and taught many new courses at Lakeside, including Big History, the Modern Middle East, Global Justice, and Diplomacy in Action: International Relations since 1989. She has likewise encouraged the rest of us to do so, and thanks to her leadership, Lakeside has offered popular courses in psychology, developing economies, comparative revolutions, and sustainability. We have more interdisciplinary offerings now, with two courses co-taught with science teachers and one with an English teacher. We have a more diverse and dynamic department full of teachers more willing to collaborate and innovate with new scholarship and technology. We are better connected with outside organizations such as the WHA, NCSS, and the Big History group and are more in touch with the latest and best work being done in our discipline.

It is delightful to see Deb in front of a group of students in her classroom. She has high standards for each of them, yet supports their efforts warmly and sincerely delights in working with adolescents. On any given day, the furniture might be pushed against the walls as students kneel on the floor over a large map of Africa with skeins of yarn, simulating the

colonization of the continent. The tables might be arranged in the shape of a courtroom, as students reenact the trial of Galileo. Her students have even put all of humanity on trial—a simulation that Deb created from a Star Trek episode that many of us use, with great success, as a culminating experience for our own world history classes. I marvel at her creativity and energy. She epitomizes Lakeside’s goal of offering students both rigor and support.

Despite all of her accomplishments, Deb is also a sincere and humble person with a self-deprecating sense of humor and a thoughtful attentiveness to those around her. As she and I transitioned in our roles this year, from department chair and teacher (and vice versa for me), Deb has been as gracious, helpful, and generous as she always has been. She has also gone above and beyond in her support for me and for others in the department. I was grateful, for example, that she helped one of our newest teachers through the first challenging experience of writing mid-term comments and grades by arranging that they work and write together throughout a whole Sunday; Deb even brought snacks and lunch!

Her influence as a world history educator goes far beyond Lakeside’s campus—she’s trained hundreds of teachers through the AP Institutes and exam readings. She’s a lifelong world traveler and is passionate about exposing young people to humanity’s past challenges and future potential.

Deb’s impact on Lakeside School has gone far beyond her own classroom and students. She is a visionary educator with an extraordinary work ethic and whole-hearted commitment to fellow teachers. I am continually inspired by and grateful for my colleague, Deborah Smith Johnston.

[Please contact us for a signed copy. Thank you.]

Sincerely,



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