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April 6, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter of recommendation for Ms. Danell Ricciardella. As the Principal of the Lower Primary at Hong Kong International School, I have had the distinct pleasure of working with Danell for the last two years, from 2007 through 2009, while she was a first grade teacher for one year and while she worked for us as a literacy consultant during this last year. Danell epitomizes what anyone would hope to see in a professional educator.

HKIS is an international school serving the expatriate community of Hong Kong. Today, over 2,600 students and 480 faculty and staff occupy the two separate campuses of HKIS. Although the school has grown manifold since its inception, the central dream of the school's early founders remains the same: to offer an excellent education for the expatriate community in Hong Kong. HKIS follows an American curriculum and many of our employees are U.S. citizens. HKIS is a member of the East Asia Regional Council of Overseas Schools and is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). WASC is one of six regional associations that accredit American Institutes of learning, both locally and overseas.

When I first met Danell, I was struck by two things; her ability to build community in her classroom and her understanding of the importance of building individual relationships with students while continuing to focus on student achievement. Danell has this amazing ability in engaging students in her classroom. She builds and fosters a sense of community with her students in her class, where each individual recognizes that they are respected and important. She models the importance of working with others and through her patience and guidance, builds an environment that is trusting and safe. Danell possesses extensive understanding of curriculum and instruction. She is a master teacher. She distinguishes herself by her understanding of best practices in education and how to implement these into the classroom. Her skill in teaching is evident when one walks into her classroom during any period of time, but especially during the science time or during the Literacy block. Danell is able to do this as she clearly understands the development of young children, the importance of viewing and understanding children as a whole child, and the need for supporting the development of each individual child.

As a member of a school community, Danell has proven to be a leader. Her leadership helped develop curriculum, as well as supported our development of literacy practices. Her ability to work collaboratively with colleagues in developing curriculum and better understandings in best practices in education was exceptional. Watching her in meetings, observing her interact with other educators, and listening to her perspectives, is pure joy. She has helped our school move towards a stronger framework in how we teach, how we design curriculum, and how we understand student learning.

Danell was an active participant in various school wide committees. She helped us develop our science curriculum and is versed in the ability to use the Understanding By Design framework. Her understandings in literacy has led me to hire Danell as a literacy consultant for this last school year, so that she can help build teacher capacity in their understanding of best practices in teaching writing and word study. Danell worked in classrooms, teaching side by side with teachers, modeling best practices and implementing a structure that would allow teachers to facilitate learning in literacy in their classes.

There are few teachers who demonstrate the skills necessary to being a master level teacher. Danell is one of them. In my short time working with her, I have learned a lot about good teaching. While that in itself is a rarity, Danell also demonstrates what being a collaborative community member is all about. Her work at our school will be long remembered.

I highly recommend Danell for a classroom position or literacy consultant position in your school. She will bring wisdom and knowledge to your school and touch the lives of the young children in every place she teaches.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maya Nelson".

Maya Nelson
Lower Primary Principal

Our Mission

Dedicating our minds to inquiry, our hearts to compassion,
and our lives to service and global understanding

*An American-style education grounded in the Christian
faith and respecting the spiritual lives of all*