

October 28, 2014

Maryland School Counselor Association

Counselor of the Year Award

Re: Letter of Recommendation for

Ms. Lise Valenta, Counselor

Cannon Road Elementary School, Silver Spring, Maryland

Greetings:

It is a great pleasure to nominate Ms. Lise Valenta for School Counselor of the Year, I do so on behalf of my entire family, and I feel certain that the community would rally behind me as well. I have known Ms. Valenta for 10 years, since my children benefited from her tutelage at Cannon Road Elementary School. I’ve had the chance to get to know Ms. Valenta in my role as a parent, as a community partner in the PTA, and as a fellow citizen, working to support the greater community. I hold Ms. Valenta in very high regard as a school counselor, a role model for children, and a community leader. I nominate Ms. Valenta because she positively impacts the lives of others through her work and she excels as a school counselor and community leader. I have seen her make a difference in the life of my daughter, in the lives of other students and families, in the school community itself, and also in the greater community. She is absolutely deserving of such an honor!

Long before Montgomery County, Maryland adopted Social Emotional Learning as one of the 3 core competencies of their Strategic Framework, Ms. Lise Valenta had already mastered the concept; she was skillfully modeling social and emotional competencies to her students and to the school community. She embraces diversity and engages the students in creating an atmosphere in the school that is caring and respectful, where responsibility is expected and where kids are ready to learn. Ms. Valenta provides the leadership at her school that creates a positive environment, where a bully-free zone is a given, and where respect and tolerance of others make up the cornerstone of the school culture.

Ms. Valenta connects with the students in a special and personal way, greeting each one by name, recognizing their talents, and encouraging them so they may achieve their maximum potential. She celebrates the uniqueness in each individual. She is extraordinarily gifted in her ability to inspire and encourage the students. Many of them, like my daughter, keep in touch with her as they matriculate through the school ranks. That is because the kids know they can trust her; she listens, she is caring, and she is fair. She models those qualities for them, teaching through her own example the values of equity, trust, empathy, and respect. When students go to see her, they know that she offers them a soft place to fall and that extra boost to regain their footing and take a step forward.

Ms. Valenta advocates for her students by inspiring them. She helps them find their own voice, empowering them to advocate for themselves. She helps them learn to identify and express their feelings and recognize the feelings of others. She gives them actual tools for their life success, such as how to weigh the pros and cons, ways to analyze a given situation, how to put things in perspective, different ways to resolve conflicts, and problem solving techniques. She provides them with a chance to learn new behaviors and new ways of thinking about situations. These are all valuable lessons that the kids take with them through life.

Ms. Valenta advocates for the students by helping them to recognize their own strengths which improves their confidence and motivates them to do their best. That kind of encouragement is one of the primary keys to success for any student, or any human being, for that matter. The more students are recognized for their individual talents and potential and the more they are encouraged to succeed, the more they achieve academically. The way she encourages students is an important contribution that has a positive and long lasting influence in a child’s life. Personally, I will always be grateful to Ms. Valenta for being a solid support and beloved mentor to my daughter, even into her teenage years.

Ms. Valenta has an open door policy with students, as well as families. Several Cannon Road ES families that I’ve known over the years have had problems or concerns and I have referred them to Ms. Valenta. Many of them have thanked me later because Ms. Valenta was able to help them work out their issues, or navigate the system, or provide them with resources and referrals they needed.

Being an active member of the PTA and a local non-profit community organization, I have had the chance to work with Ms. Valenta on many occasions. Ms. Valenta has always been a steadfast supporter of PTA efforts to engage parents and to bring the school community together. She consistently reaches out to be inclusive of all, most notably ESOL families and other newcomers.

Cannon Road ES is among the highest poverty level schools in Montgomery County and Ms. Valenta works hard to implement programs to help those families; she takes a personal interest in making sure their basic needs are met. She procures hats and coats so that no child is cold in the winter, and she makes sure they all get lunch. Not a holiday goes by that Ms. Valenta is not discretely organizing something special for families that may not be able to afford a holiday turkey or gifts for their children.

Ms. Valenta’s leadership role extends beyond the school. When disasters hit, Ms Valenta’s leadership shines as an example of how to pull the community together in support of those suffering. I have seen Ms. Valenta lead many community driven efforts to provide food and clothing for those in need and we have worked together on some of those projects. She inspired her colleagues, her students, and families to also give back to the community. This is arguably one of the most important lessons in life. I have always admired Ms. Valenta for her generous and caring heart and her many acts of kindness.

I nominate Ms. Valenta for Counselor of the Year because she distinguishes herself as a leader who emulates the high ethical standards one would hope for in a person so influential in the lives of young students. She is an exceptional person who is esteemed by her colleagues, admired by the parent community, and adored by her students. She models good citizenship to her students, her families and to the greater community. She works hard to create an environment at her school that is safe, conducive to learning, and where everyone feels included, supported, and respected. Ms. Valenta makes a positive impact on students as well as on the community; she is a model counselor and citizen. By choosing Ms. Valenta as Counselor of the Year, younger counselors will be able to benefit from her fine example. We need more counselors like Ms. Lise Valenta in our schools!

Respectfully submitted with kind regards,

Ann Coletti

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