



March 13, 2019

To Whom it May Concern:

I have been in the field of education for over fifteen years, in the capacity of teacher, staff developer, professor of education, school leadership, and most currently working for the New Teacher Center, an organization that trains seasoned teachers and school leaders on how to accelerate and retain beginning teachers in service of our students. Olivia Santoro exemplifies the theory of action of my organization - retaining talented educators is harder than ever before and yet one of the most important levers to create educational equity for our students. I say all of this to say, in all my work around new teachers, I have never seen the talent and passion that I see in Olivia.

I'm particularly grateful for this bit of luck since how I know Olivia is that she is my son's preschool teacher. Jonah entered her classroom, and school for the first time, in September 2018 at 2 years old. This year has been transformational for Jonah and we credit Olivia with so much of it. There is so much I could say about her teaching, but the things I'd most like to highlight are her communication and flexibility, as well as her strength in attending to and weaving together academic rigor and social emotional learning.

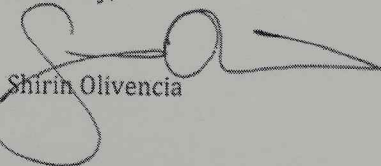
Olivia communicates daily and regularly with families; there are individualized daily sheets that come home cataloguing nap and potty visits. She sends home monthly notices with important dates and what's being worked on in class. If I send Olivia an e-mail, I get a prompt, pleasant and thorough response back. As if those methods of communication weren't enough, Olivia maintains an online class portal via Dojo, where she posts photos of the children. One of my favorite aspects of these posts are her captions. A caption might read, "Working on our fine motor skills today" or "Self directed center play, helping kids to learn patience and teamwork". These captions reveal what a deep understanding Olivia already has about the importance of there being academic purposefulness to activities, as well as the significance of social emotional learning going hand in hand with those academic skills.

What has most captured me, however, is how Olivia attends to my son as an individual and how even as a beginning teacher, she can differentiate lessons and activities accordingly. Jonah is a typical two-year-old, all quirks associated. While some of his friends might love the Thanksgiving handprint activity or finger-painting a planter, this is a no go for him. Rather than leave him out, Olivia is always looking for alternatives. For Thanksgiving she traced his hand and he could color it in, for the planters she had a stack of stickers such that he could still decorate. It's clear when I talk to Olivia that she is not just happy to make these adjustments - she is passionate about inclusivity and how to make all things accessible to each child. She does this day in and day out, and has shared with me her plans for how scaffold his experiences to support him moving through this sensory resistance.

I cannot say enough what a joy and pleasure it is to have Olivia as my son's teacher. His independence, behavior, and genuine love for learning is clearly a result of her dedication, flexibility, and underlying passion for the work.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any additional questions at: solivencia@newteachercenter.org or at 917-285-3049.

Sincerely,



Shirin Olivencia