

Friends at Miami often ask me, “What do you teach?” I used to automatically reply with the seemingly obvious answer, “everything.” I now catch myself pausing and reflecting on the true weight of that word, “everything.” When I first came to Central I was sure that everything meant reading, writing, math, social studies, and science. Furthermore, I was sure that I would be the one doing most of the teaching. How wrong I was! In these past few months, twenty-six unique students and one very special teacher have taught me more than I could imagine, not only about these basic subjects, but also about life. Each one has molded me into the teacher I am today and helped me to realize the kind of teacher I aspire to be.

Mrs. Andrade and our students have taught me that with progressive education and the democratic process, school is about so much more than academics. Completing word problems in math becomes celebrating the successes of our peers. Group work becomes a lesson on utilizing one another’s strengths and counting on each member of your team. A unit on writing letters becomes a way to build relationships and an outlet for expressing our appreciation for one another.

Our students are cultivating qualities that make them all not only good people, but thoughtful citizens. For example, a good person would be an older who has no problem helping out a younger at her table. An exceptional person, such as *Paige*, is willing to take that younger under her wing to the extent that *Cody* has taken to helping others the way she has helped him. He is always the first person to give you the pencil out of his hand or words of encouragement. Likewise, *Frankie* is the kind of person who likes to share what he has with as many people as possible. *Christian* is another giver. His mom recently asked why he was asking her for more crayons and art supplies. I told her that he was always sharing. *Aby*, another exceptional person, astounds us with her willingness to be a partner whom her peers can count on.

There are a group of individuals whose daily routines involve more than just themselves. *Kaitlyn* and *Raven* take care of the breakfast sheet and bin every morning. *Eristan* helps figure out the lunch count every day. And in order to let the entire school know that all of the buses have arrived, *Jordan* pulls down the stop sign every afternoon. *Brooklynne* is the keeper of the math manipulatives. If you wonder why the math tools are so nice and tidy, it is because she does a fantastic job of collecting and organizing our materials. *Jayden* and *Serina* have shown their willingness to do whatever needs to be done for the good of our community, including cleaning our room until it is spotless. Finally, *Kirsten* and *Ahvonni*’s never-ending daily requests to help with anything reminds us that we are not alone in this boat.

It is also heartwarming to see the empathy that students such as *Taylor* and *Dillynn* have for their fellow students. You will often find them comforting a friend in tears, doing whatever possible to bring joy back to that person. Others have learned that it is hard to do things on their own. *Alex* and *Matthew* have especially recognized this in themselves and have come to be each other’s cheerleader working together to accomplish whatever comes their way.

Another outstanding quality that these students possess is their eagerness to lead by example. As an older in the room, *Ethan* can always be found challenging himself on his math goals. And the ripple effect is awesome as others have also started asking for higher CGI Numbers. *Emma* and *Charlie* are emerging younger leaders who have readily taken on more and more responsibility. *Emma* has taken charge of the lunch cards ensuring everyone who needs a card has it for lunch. When *Gavin* recently told everyone that he considered *Charlie* his best friend, no one found it surprising since *Charlie* is always so constructive in the ways he guides others.

Some have touched us with their individual gifts. There is *Will* who goes big. Our first taste at this was his extraordinary vision to design an extrinsic pattern on the side of his dream school. In turn, others were inspired to think more creatively. Additionally, there is *Madyson* whose geometrical eye helped so many groups complete different stages of their dream schools. And when we hear *Josie* talk about her passion for horses, it reminds us that there is more to life than just hitting the books or crunching those numbers. Lastly, there is this young lady named *Morgan* who uses her artistic nature in her written work. Having been bitten by the stage bug (performing in her first theater production this year), she is writing a play that she wishes to produce.

I am so proud of what these students have accomplished and am honored to have been able to witness the development of all of these wonderful souls. I know that in the future, when I am asked, “What do you teach?” I will tell them that my classroom is a community that comes together to learn everything about math, relationships, reading, service, science, how to be good people, and so much more. I am forever grateful to Mrs. Andrade, our students, and my Central Academy Family for teaching me what it really means to teach— to reach for the stars!