

November 2017

Dear Members of the Peer Review Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit my peer review portfolio for your consideration. Since beginning my role as the health educator at Bethel Elementary School in the fall of 2016, I have been working toward my initial teaching license with an endorsement in preschool through sixth grade health. Through a combination of graduate courses, workshops, and classroom work, I have sought to gain the knowledge and skills I need to improve my practice and build a health program that has a positive, meaningful, and long-term impact on my students' well-being.

My journey to becoming a health educator actually began many years ago, when I received a Masters Degree in Education from Harvard University and subsequently taught middle school English for two years at a small, independent school in Massachusetts. I took time off from teaching to work in a community for people with disabilities, then spent a number of joyful and busy years as a stay-at-home mom to my three sons. It was my experience in parenting that ultimately led me to the field of health. One of my children struggled with significant sensory challenges and anxiety in his early years and I realized that I would need to make a serious commitment to the health of my whole family in order to support my son. I spent a great deal of time studying health topics ranging from nutrition to stress management and was delighted that when I was ready to return to work, I was able to find an education-oriented role as the Community Health Coordinator for a local health nonprofit. My two years at Health Connections provided wonderful opportunities to dig deeper into the field of health and allowed me to do everything from teaching cooking classes at elementary schools to leading smoking cessation groups for adults. The more I worked with children, the more I knew that I wanted to return to the classroom on a regular basis, where I could cultivate relationships with students and help them learn about, value, and practice good health. Needless to say, I leapt at the opportunity to teach health in Bethel and I absolutely love the work I do!

I believe passionately in the importance of providing students with health education from an early age. The skills and functional knowledge that children develop during health class can have an enormous positive impact, not simply on their childhood, but on the choices they make as adults. Ultimately, I believe that health educators can play an important role in helping children to be healthy and happy so that they can learn in school and thrive in life--what a wonderful job!

The process of working toward my license has been an arduous but powerful learning experience for me. Compiling this portfolio allowed me ample opportunities to reflect on my practice--it helped me see my strengths as well as nudge me toward improvement in my weakest areas. I consider myself a better educator because of the work I have done to earn my license and I plan to seek out more courses and workshops so that I can continue my professional growth. I am grateful for your time in reviewing my work and I look forward to hearing your feedback.

Sincerely,

Laurie Smith