

Department of Education of the City of New York

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Dr. Richard A. Forman, Principal

To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing this letter to share my experience with Melissa Bouganin and the Left2Write program at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn. I am so grateful that we were able to participate in this program, as it resulted in an incredibly memorable and creatively empowering experience for my students.

Melissa is a very talented educator, who immediately succeeded in creating an environment where students felt safe, supported and valued as individuals. Her workshop curriculum was also very impressive, and it clear that she spent a great deal of time planning and preparing for each session. Each session had a clear focus, and she introduced students to a diverse variety of writers, through videos of readings and printed texts, while also employing strategies designed to allow them to produce and revise their own original writing.

Our group of participants included students across grade levels from a range of different social circles. Melissa's energy and approach successfully resulted in allowing the students to feel like a cohesive group with a strong sense of community. This had a very powerful impact, especially for our 9th grade students, who are still trying to figure out where they may "fit in" within the high school landscape.

Melissa also exudes positive energy, and cultivated an environment that encourages students to share their writing openly. I observed a unique transformation with one student in particular, who I have taught for 2 years. She is very reserved during classes and rarely participates. However, she seemed like a completely different person during the workshop, as she engaged in her writing, and showed no hesitation to share her work with her peers. I almost didn't even recognize her, and this speaks to how valuable it is to maintain programs like Left2Write, which provide students with a outlet to explore writing as it pertains them personally.

One of the most unique aspects of the Left2Write program is the beautiful literary magazine that students produced towards the end of the workshop. I was so excited to see how proud and accomplished my students felt when provided with an opportunity to see their work "published" and the literary magazine itself was beautifully printed and designed. This is something that our school would have never been able to do without the Left2Write program. Furthermore, it provides students with a unique sense of empowerment, to create a tangible product, and give them an opportunity to collaboratively "make" something of value, to showcase their writing and art for others to experience and enjoy. Our school leaders and other teachers have also been very impressed with the literary magazine. Our school Principal even requested a copy to share with District Superintendent.

Creative writing is such a powerful tool to give students agency and "voice", yet it is unfortunately overlooked by many teachers (myself included.) When faced with the responsibility

of preparing students for Regents exam and other standardized tests that focus on argumentative writing, we often find little room in the curriculum to give students a platform to write freely about themselves or the experiences that make them unique individuals.

Our school has a limited offering of extracurricular activities, and many of the after-school activities that teachers do devote their time to are often academic, such as Regents Tutoring. However, in order for students to develop positive feelings about school overall, they need offerings that appeal to their interests, and allow them to form meaningful connections with their peers. Left2Write succeeded in filling that void for our school, and I am incredibly grateful that we were able to participate in and benefit from this program. I have already had several students ask me "Is Melissa coming back next year?" and I am hoping that that the answer will be yes.

If you have any further questions about our experience with Melissa and Left2Write, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

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