



October 16, 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Rhys Smoker. Mr. Smoker worked at Explorations Academy from Fall 2019-Summer 2021 as a teacher and core faculty member. Needless to say, this was an exceptionally challenging time to be a teacher. Nonetheless, Mr. Smoker proved to be exceptional in many regards.

First and foremost, I would like to highlight the fact that he was able to connect with many of the students who are most challenged in conventional school settings. I received several letters from parents of those who had never previously enjoyed school commending Mr. Smoker for his ability to connect with their children. He proved particularly adept working with students on the autism spectrum and those with anxiety disorders. Those students who would fall through the cracks or cause major disciplinary issues in other settings all adored Mr. Smoker and were willing to do the work for him that they would not produce in other settings.

In addition, I would like to highlight Mr. Smoker's adaptability. Not only did he quickly adapt to covid-related changes in modality, he also led the effort amongst the middle school teachers to provide every class twice, once online and once in-person rather than opting for hybrid offerings. He took on this added workload out of a core belief that it provided a better educational experience for all involved despite doubling the amount of time that he spent in front of students.

Finally, I believe it is essential to mention the versatility that Mr. Smoker demonstrated during his time at Explorations Academy. In addition to the full teaching load that he shouldered, he also was a key member in all of the activities that would be considered extracurricular in most institutions. He started a Lego Robotics team that competed across the state against much larger institutions. He readily volunteered to drive the school bus to and from urban and wilderness settings. He led groups of backpackers, and he did all the food preparation for such adventures. And he routinely opted to be the advisor for the most difficult students. In short, he is willing to do all the behind the scenes work to be a coach and mentor in addition to being a teacher.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions that you might have.

Sincerely,

J. Bacchus Taylor  
Head of School (retired)