

March 1, 2014

Dear Cary Academy,

In my career as an educator, I have worked in hundreds of schools, taught in thousands of classrooms, and trained over 20,000 teachers. I know what great teaching is and how great teachers manifest their craft through rich interactions with their students—and this is why I know that David Holmes will be a great teacher at Cary Academy.

As noted educator Ken Macrorie once wrote, "Great teaching in any field isn't a matter of employing gimmicks and choosing from a damn-fool encyclopedia of tricks to play on students on Monday, but a matter of setting up a climate friendly to learning and then challenging learners to connect their experiences and ideas with those of the accepted authorities or producers."

David knows how to set up a climate friendly to learning. He did this time and again when we worked together on a large education software project for The Gates Foundation. I was a team product owner and David was our software architect. On an almost daily basis, David provided me with the technical lessons I needed to make effective product development decisions for our project. He was actually the instructional leader of our entire team, frequently providing valued and valuable whiteboard sessions.

In order to challenge learners to connect their ideas with those of the accepted authorities and producers, the best teachers know the accepted authorities and are producers themselves. David is fully qualified in both regards.

The research base on educational effectiveness points clearly to depth of content knowledge as a fundamental trait of successful teachers, especially in math and science at the secondary level. David's training in physics at one of the world's premier universities will serve the students of Cary Academy well.

But David's knowledge of and passion for physics go beyond traditional academic norms. As I have come know him, David *is* a physicist. Years after concluding his formal education, he continues to devote significant time and effort delving into areas of original thinking and discovery in the field.

Has David been a teacher of record in a high school physics class? Not to my knowledge. Does that bear on his ability to be an extraordinary physics teacher at Cary Academy? In my opinion, it does not. To the contrary, David's life and work experience tell me that he is a superior candidate for any teaching position, secondary or post-secondary.

I am fortunate that my work in education affords me regular opportunities to exchange ideas with some of the best teachers, principals, researchers, and policy makers in the world. Brilliant and accomplished as these people are, few, if any, have truly original ideas about curriculum and instruction—fewer still have the technical and intellectual capacity, as well as the dedication and work ethic, required to carry them out. David does. I have talked for hours with him about his philosophy and approach to the teaching of physics; I think his ideas are both innovative and inspiring.

Cary Academy is a very special environment in which to learn and to teach. I imagine you will have dozens of highly qualified applicants for this position, most with years of classroom experience and many of the other traditional résumé details that mark them as well-suited to the job. But I don't think you'll find anyone like David.

Your school has always stood out for me as a place where extraordinary things happened because extraordinary people commit themselves to creating unique and uniquely rewarding experiences for students based on strong relationships and a shared passion for intellectual inquiry. David is one of these extraordinary people. He is, in my mind, a perfect fit, not only for the position, but also for the school's culture and its enduring commitment to excellence.

No one knows a teacher better than his students. I took physics in high school and wasn't inspired by my teacher or the subject matter. As an adult, however, I have come to enjoy physics a great deal, mostly through books I've read. But I've never enjoyed it as much as when David has taught it to me. He is the best physics teacher I have ever had and I am confident that your students will feel just as I do when he is teaching them.

Sincerely,



Steve Peha
Founder, Teaching That Makes Sense