

Leigh Florita

Educator | Leader | Learner

Phone: 720-201-2269
Address: 11762 Ouray Ct.
Commerce City, CO 80022
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December 28, 2020

Wyoming School Boards Association
Superintendent Search –Fremont County School District #2
2323 Pioneer Avenue
Cheyenne WY 82001

Re: Superintendent Search –Fremont County School District #2

To Whom it May Concern:

Picture in your mind for a moment the perfect candidate for the superintendent position at Fremont County School District #2. I imagine that person to be an experienced school administrator with a diverse portfolio spanning urban to suburban, public and public charter, large and small schools, elementary, middle, and high school, along with experience serving families from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. It's likely your ideal candidate would be bilingual and culturally responsive in order to connect effectively with families and staff members from all walks of life. It would most certainly be optimal if your hire had extensive experience creating and overseeing programs such as Special Education, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education, Professional Development, Gifted & Talented, and MTSS. That leader would be especially skilled in creating a comprehensive professional development program that spanned hiring to new teacher induction to coaching teachers to mentoring current and future leaders.

A leader fit for Dubois would love and believe in all children while having a track record of success creating and maintaining educational programming that leads to excellent learning outcomes, such as increasing math scores in 7th and 8th grades by 11.0 and 6.8 points respectively over two years, and decreasing tardies by 21% over three years, and achieving the goal of 80% of students having a 3.0 GPA or better. I would hope that a desirable candidate would also have experienced her fair share of failures over her career, teaching her to lead other professionals with humility and grace when helping guide a school community through change and growth, while keeping her values and goals always at the forefront.

If this description fits the attributes your district team believes your district leaders should possess, then I would like to present myself as the ideal choice for Superintendent of Fremont County School District #2. I grew up the granddaughter and daughter of poor farmers in the midwest, then as my father pursued further education to become a pastor, I had the opportunity to move about the country and experience a great variety of cultures and schools from the Los Angeles area to a rural North Dakota border town. I graduated high school as valedictorian of my class of 11 students while playing multiple sports and being involved in nearly every extracurricular offered, as is common in small towns. I have built a school from the ground up to provide students from poverty with a college preparatory education while simultaneously getting them four years of career experience through a weekly internship. I have built and maintained programs that support our students with special learning needs as part of a more affluent K-12 public charter school. I have taught high school Spanish to students in a large suburban school, and English to Spanish high school students in a small, rural community.

I would be honored to be considered for your hiring process.

Yours in Education,

Leigh N. Florita, M.S.

Enclosures: Resume, Letters of Recommendation, Transcripts, Assurance Form, Screening Questions

Fremont County School District #2
Dubois, Wyoming
SUPERINTENDENT ASSURANCE FORM

Name: Leigh Florita
Present Address: 11762 Ouray Ct
City, State, Zip: Commerce City, CO 80022

Home Phone #: 720-201-2269 Business Phone #: 303-289-8088 x186
Cell Phone #: 720-201-2269 Email Address: _____
Present Position: Middle School Principal Present Salary: \$105,000
Enrollment of Above Position: 443 in the middle school, 1880 K-12 # of Employees: 22 Direct Reports, About 200 Total Employees at The Academy

(Please check Yes or No)

- a) Are you currently under contract? Yes: No: (it's a charter school, so no official "contract")
- b) Do you hold a current Superintendent's Certificate? Yes: No:
- c) Have you ever been involuntarily terminated or asked to resign?
Yes: No: (If yes, please give details.)
- d) Have you ever reached a mutual decision with an employing agency to vacate a contract prior to its expiration?
Yes: No: (If yes, please explain.)
- e) Have you ever been convicted of or pled nolo contendere to or otherwise received a deferred sentence in consideration of fulfilling the terms of probation as to any felony or crime relating to child abuse or neglect, or any crime relating to sexual abuse of a minor?
Yes: No: (If yes, please explain.)
- f) Moral turpitude is an act of baseness, vileness, or depravity in the private and social duties which a person owes another member of society or society in general and which is contrary to the accepted rule of right and duty between persons, including, but not limited to, theft, attempted theft, murder, rape, embezzlement, and indecency with a minor. Have you ever been convicted of a felony or any offense involving moral turpitude?
Yes: No: (If yes, please explain.)
- g) Has any court received a plea of guilty or a plea of nolo contendere from you for any offense involving moral turpitude, deferring proceedings without entering a finding of guilty and placed you on probation?
Yes: No: (If yes, please explain.)
- h) Has a claim of discrimination or harassment ever been made against you, or based upon your conduct, with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or any parallel state agency enforcing anti-discrimination statutes? Yes: No: (If yes, please explain.)
- i) Have you ever been sued in civil court, or has a lawsuit ever been filed based upon your conduct, asserting a claim of discrimination or harassment prohibited by state or federal laws?

Yes: ___ No: x (If yes, please explain.)

NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

Fremont County School District #2 hereby notifies all of its employees, students and potential employees that it does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or handicap in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its educational programs or activities. Inquiries concerning Title II, Title VI, Title IX, Section 504 and the Age Discrimination Act may be referred to this district's Superintendent of Schools or the Wyoming Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Coordinator, 122 W 25th Street, Suite E200, Cheyenne, WY 82002 or phone (307) 777-6218.

Pursuant to the provisions of W.S. 21-7-401, any employee who is hired by the school board on or after July 1, 1996 who may have access to minors, is required to submit to fingerprinting and provide such other information as is necessary for the School District to acquire a national criminal history background check.

I acknowledge that inquiries may be made to obtain job-related information from my previous and present employers, whether or not they are listed on the attached application, and that similar inquiries may be directed to the persons listed as professional references as well as to any other individuals who know me.

I further acknowledge that Fremont County School District #2 and/or the Wyoming School Boards Association may, at its discretion, make inquiries of law enforcement agencies, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and educational institutions as well as initiate investigations by private persons for the purpose of verifying information supplied by me or to obtain additional information. I authorize such inquiry and investigation and the giving and receiving of any information requested by the school district as part of such inquiry and investigation.

I also release Fremont County School District #2, Wyoming School Boards Association and its board of directors and members from liability for any claims arising from such inquiry and investigation.

I affirm that all information provided by me on this application is true, and I understand that if any part of the information is false or misrepresented (including omission of information called for), my application may not be considered, or if I am hired by Fremont County School District #2 will be sufficient grounds for discharge.

I understand that Fremont County School District #2 and Wyoming School Boards Association personnel and any selection committees may have access to this completed application and essay questions as part of the hiring process.

I also understand that if I am offered a contract and subsequently decline, Fremont County School District #2 will only pay one-half of my reasonable travel expenses for my interview.

A photocopy, fax or electronic copy of this release shall be effective as the original. Submission of this form via electronic transfer does not require a signature but will constitute acceptance of all the above acknowledgements.

Applicant's
Signature:

Leigh N. Florita

Date: 12/28/20

Instructions for sending Assurance Form:

Via mail: Wyoming School Boards Association
Superintendent Search – Fremont County School District #2
2323 Pioneer Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82001

Via Fax: 307-634-1114

Via email: wsba@wsba-wy.org

Leigh Florita

Educator | Leader | Learner

Phone: 720-201-2269
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Email: leigh.florita@gmail.com

A versatile educator, school administrator, and lifelong learner who has created healthy learning environments in suburban, urban, private, and public schools over the course of a 20+ year career. Has tailored educational programming to meet the different learning styles and needs of all students, enabling them to succeed in the classroom and as global citizens. Mentors future educational leaders to thrive within their roles and grow professionally. Highly adept at creating a sense of community amongst administrators, teachers, and parents to act in harmony and serve the best interests of the students. Seeking the next leadership opportunity in a tight-knit community.

SKILLS

Languages: English (Native) | Spanish (Fluent)
Interpersonal: Public Speaking | Leadership | Cross-Cultural Communication | Community Building | Mentorship
Expertise: Strategic Planning | Creative Problem-Solving | Exceptional Student Services | Professional Development

EXPERIENCE

The Academy of Charter Schools

08.2010-Present | Westminster, CO

Middle School Principal | K-12 Special Programs Coordinator

- Overseeing all day-to-day middle school operations within a fast-paced, academic environment focused on college and career preparedness.
- Creating, evaluating, and maintaining all K-12 teacher hiring, mentoring, evaluation, and professional development programming.
- Supervising, guiding, and ensuring legal compliance with K-12 Special Education, ELL, and Gifted and Talented programs.
- Implementing innovative educational programming that increased math achievement scores by 11.0 and 6.8 points over two years for the 7th and 8th grades respectively.
- Reducing tardies by 21% across the institution over three years with a standardized, community-based approach.
- Uplifting teachers and nurturing excellence in all areas of the institution.

St. Peter Claver Cristo Rey Catholic High School

08.2008-06.2010 | Omaha, NE

High School Principal

- Played an instrumental role in the launch of an urban private school as its first acting principal.
- Built a dynamic educational environment from scratch alongside 20+ educators.
- Oversaw an experiential learning program where all students interned within local businesses one day per week to gain hands-on work experience in exchange for tuition scholarship.
- Coached disadvantaged students to assemble competitive profiles by maximizing the potential of opportunities.
- Instituted a social skills curriculum as part of a restorative in-school suspension program nearly eliminating out-of-school suspensions.

Millard South High School

01.2001-05.2008 | Omaha, NE

Spanish Teacher

- Instructed highly engaging Spanish language lessons with an emphasis on cultural responsiveness.
- Increased student achievement by 3% using Comprehensible Input and Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling strategies focused on language acquisition.
- Taught one semester of English in Spain through the Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program.

Rochester Educational Consulting

08.2016-Present

District Consultant

- Conducted charter renewal site visits as part of an external team evaluating charter adherence to district contracts.
- Served as team lead and sponsor for school leaders gaining invaluable professional experience.
- Evaluated charter school applications for the Colorado Department of Education.
- Reviewed charter grant applications providing needed funding for state-approved start-up charters.

EDUCATION

The University of Nebraska at Omaha

08.2008 | Omaha, NE

Master of Science in Educational Administration

Black Hills State University

12.2000 | Spearfish, SD

Bachelor of Science in Education

Major: Spanish | **Minor:** Middle School Education

Superintendent Search Screening Questions for Fremont County School District #2

Responses to the following questions will be used in screening candidates. Please limit responses to a total of **four (4) pages**.

- 1) What experiences and personal accomplishments lead you to believe you can be successful if hired as superintendent of this district?

To be successful in a rural community it's important to share the values and background that the people of that community possess, as well as understanding the realities of living in a remote area. In parentis loco is a common term heard in education meaning schools take on some of the legal responsibilities of parenting while the children are at school. Schools take on even more these days, such as character education and physical safety, and mental health support, to name a few. When I think of my own child's school, I want to be assured that the leader of that school is not only of high moral character, but that I can also connect with them as a human being.

Growing up in rural America for the majority of my upbringing instilled in me the values of hard work, good people, and strong communities. I graduated from high school in Pembina, North Dakota, which I venture to guess shares many similarities to Dubois in that the weather can get treacherous, the nearest major shopping is an hour away on a good day, and the people are salt of the earth. My family comes from Iowa farmers so I grew up tending to livestock, which taught me the value of hard work and doing whatever is needed to get the job done. And though we ended up moving around once my father entered the ministry after 5th grade, he served only rural communities which taught me it's the people that make the place, and I have made life-long friends in each of those small towns. I have worked only 3 jobs in my adult professional career, demonstrating my value of loyalty and commitment to a community, and though each opportunity taught me a great deal, I was by far the happiest in my small, close-knit Academy community which we like to refer to as being like a small town in the big city. I am well-suited and well-prepared for small-town life due to this upbringing.

I have also had the great opportunity to work in a K-12 charter school for the past 10+ years and gain experience overseeing or learning nearly every aspect of running a school. I myself have been in charge of not only our middle school but all our K-12 special programs such as special education, English language development, professional development, gifted and talented education, and MTSS. I have been closely involved with the school finance and governance side of the operation as well in order to learn the fiduciary responsibility and operational needs critical to the success of a public charter school.

All these experiences and attributes combined, as well as the academic successes I've achieved over my 20-year career, make me ideally suited for this role.

- 2) What experience do you have in delivering a well-rounded educational program in a remote community? How would you ensure all students have quality educational opportunities?

While I have not delivered education in a remote community myself, I have experienced education in a remote community and worked in small schools for much of my career. What it requires to deliver a high quality education to students in rural settings is:

- a) **involving the community in creative and innovative ways to give students both practical and real-world experiences that prepare them for college and career as well as gaining the necessary credits for high school graduation. For instance, can high school students serve**

as interns at a local business to gain experience and potentially earn business or finance course credit?

- b) utilizing technology to provide opportunities for coursework and learning programs that can enhance the school's available offerings. There are so many fantastic online courses and learning platforms that can assist schools in providing a well-rounded experience for students.
- c) outside of the box thinking when it comes to scheduling and utilization of personnel, most importantly each individual's unique gifts and skills that can be put to use in non-traditional ways. Does the math teacher know how to weld and can offer CTE credits? What grade levels can be combined in multiple ways to assure elementary students are receiving a high-quality foundational education?

- 3) Explain your approach to problem solving and how you would handle those that might require a difficult decision? Provide an example if you can.

When approaching a difficult decision, whenever possible I start by reaching out to my most trusted colleagues to collaboratively brainstorm potential solutions, and whenever possible, I will also look to experts in whatever area the problem lies and/or to what other organizations have done (successfully) when faced with a similar problem. Depending on the situation, in a school I prefer to speak to at least a small group of students and families as well to gain insight into stakeholder opinion on an issue prior to making a difficult decision. It is rarely the case that a decision should or has to be made in a vacuum, but there are times when a leader is called to do just that as well, and must be up to the task. It is the ultimate burden of leadership, to know that you will have to make many difficult decisions, and you may be wrong from time to time, You must be ready to accept that responsibility using the best information available to you in that moment, including but not limited to any research, data, community input, financial position and future financial impacts, etc., to inform that decision. And then, you must be decisive.

My most recent example of difficult decision-making was around determining if and when our school should move from in-person learning to remote learning, and then back. We met often as a senior leadership team to discuss various options. We kept abreast of the governor's recommendations, CDC and CDPHE's guidance, county COVID numbers, internal COVID cases and quarantines, parent surveys, staff surveys, and student surveys to best inform our decision. Not everyone agreed of course, but we were able to provide a reasonable rationale supported by professional guidance and sleep well knowing we did the best we could for the specific needs of our community with the information we had available.

- 4) If budget cuts should become necessary, how would you suggest it be accomplished?
- It is the responsibility of the superintendent to be constantly looking for ways to be more efficient with spending, as well as preparing well in advance to make cuts, and know where to make those cuts when the time comes. On a regular cycle we should be reviewing ongoing fixed operational costs such as cleaning, landscaping, and other service contracts to make sure we're getting the best pricing possible (understanding the competition for many of these services may be limited in Dubois) and renegotiate if needed. We should annually review our benefits package if possible to make sure we're getting the most for our money while taking care of our employees. The budget should be reviewed monthly to monitor trends and assure we're staying within the general guidelines of 60-70% being fixed personnel costs, 15-25% being facilities costs, and 10-15% allotted to purchases services, supplies, repair and replace, etc. Grants should be continuously explored to offset costs and**

provide opportunities that may not otherwise be available. But when it comes time to make cuts, I would follow most of the above problem-solving steps and look to collaborate with my other professional colleagues and board members. I would do all I could to make sure the people are taken care of and look first to cut costs outside of the “fixed” areas of personnel and facilities. I would then look at any contracts that could be renegotiated or cut altogether and supported through a less expensive or volunteer means. As a last resort, I would look at educational programming and personnel, beginning with programming potentially considered “enrichment” and personnel that would be considered classified or support personnel, maintaining highly qualified certified staff to the extent possible.

- 5) How would you work with the board to ensure that a common vision is defined and that resources are aligned to meet the needs of various stakeholders?

Step one upon beginning employment with Fremont County School District #2 would be sitting down with the Board of Directors to understand and/or develop a comprehensive vision for the school that includes all stakeholders, as it is the superintendent’s job description to uphold that vision. Every decision and strategic goal must stem from that vision, including aligning the budget and resource allocations, staff training, and academic goals. Monthly meetings of the BOD, as well as any board committees, are critical to maintaining adherence to that vision and creating a cadence of accountability for all.

- 6) What would be your highest priorities if you were superintendent of this district and how would you ensure those priorities are addressed?

My priority as a superintendent would always be to provide the highest quality education possible to the students of Dubois. The most effective way to achieve academic excellence, per countless research studies, is through hiring and developing the highest quality educators. To that end, I would assure that there are strong and effective systems and processes in place from top bottom including but not limited to:

- a) hiring
- b) induction/orientation
- c) professional development
- d) evaluation
- e) professional learning communities

- 7) Describe the types of data that you believe are important to guide board decisions related to improving student achievement and graduation rate.

Improving graduation rates starts at the lower levels by ensuring students are reading and writing, and doing math, at or above grade level, and that each student is making adequate growth year over year to continue that proficiency. Keeping close tabs on that data and intervening effectively when students are not achieving adequately, as well as tracking and intervening early with course failure in high school, is the best way to improve student achievement and achieve high graduation rates. To that end, an assessment tool such as NWEA MAPS or Star Math and Star Reading are great benchmarking tools to measure both achievement and growth, and then once students are in high school the PSAT/SAT or ACT Aspire can help schools monitor that academic success and college readiness and make appropriate strategic decisions.

- 8) What is your experience with Professional Learning Communities and how would you use them to enhance teaching and learning within the district?

I was trained early on and extensively by the man himself, Richard DuFour and his team of experts at Solution Tree at one of his week-long conferences. I was also fortunate to be teaching in a large school district in Omaha, NE when they instituted these practices as well, so I've gotten to experience it as a teacher, then as a leader implementing the practices in my new school and training teachers and other leaders in those practices. At its roots, PLCs need to be sure they have clearly defined/answered:

- 1) What do you want students to learn?
- 2) How will you know when they've learned it?
- 3) What will you do when they haven't learned it?
- 4) What will you do when they have already learned it?

Those questions must drive every aspect of team meetings, and those teams must be relentless in using academic data (see Question #2) gathered at the classroom, grade level, and school level to collaboratively answer Questions #3 and #4. Professional development comes in when teachers are in need of different strategies and tools for HOW to help students who need intervention or enrichment in order to attain mastery. It doesn't matter if you taught it, it matters if they learned it!

- 9) How would you ensure that all staff members are performing according to district expectations?

As mentioned above as part of the systems and procedures I would assure are in place, a robust evaluation system is required to not only measure staff performance, but more importantly to clearly understand where there are individual or collective weaknesses that can be improved through targeted instructional coaching and/or professional development. I would expect each job description to be accompanied by a performance rubric that clearly and comprehensively describes the performance expectations, both practically and professionally, for each role within the school. Then depending on the role, regular evaluation meetings, which I prefer to call coaching meeting to imply that we're always striving to improve on a daily basis, rather than being evaluated irregularly, should be held to not only help each individual grow, but to build a strong relationship with each as well as to provide a cadence of accountability.

- 10) How does the Superintendent build a positive board/superintendent relationship?

I would hope and assume that in a small community such as Dubois there would be many opportunities to interact more casually through community and school events, our children's activities, and other social events. These would be opportunities I would look to for getting to know each board member on a more personal level. On a professional level, holding vision-building sessions, committee meetings, and other school business related events in which we can share and discuss and debate all go a long way to building mutual respect and strong communication about what we care about most, our children.

Submitted by (Name): Leigh N. Florita

Instructions for sending <u>Superintendent Screening Questions</u> :	
<u>Via mail:</u>	Wyoming School Boards Association Superintendent Search – Fremont County School District #2 2323 Pioneer Avenue Cheyenne, WY 82001
<u>Via Fax:</u>	307-634-1114
<u>Via Email:</u>	wsba@wsba-wy.org

Kyle Farner

3953 La Plata Court
Brighton, CO 80601
(303) 919-6761
kylefarner@aol.com

April 13, 2020

To whom it may concern:

It is an honor to recommend Leigh Florita to your hiring committee. She is one of the greatest leaders with whom I have had the pleasure of working. I served as Assistant Principal to Leigh from 2013-2016.

My career spans 16 years in education and the past year in the energy industry, I have worked with leaders in capacities from department heads to principals, board members to superintendents, and field foreman to corporate CEOs. In my experience, Leigh shows more aptitude for quality leadership and development of leaders than anyone I have come across.

Our time at The Academy of Charter Schools is a testament to her skill. As an administrative team, we developed quality control measures for our teachers and students using data points built upon research-based best practices. Her leadership was vital in this difficult transition. While each team member had responsibilities for creating the system, it was Leigh who designed and implemented the professional development necessary to get our teachers on board and increase their capacity. In the first year, we saw exponential growth in our teachers' ability to deliver quality instruction to students and that growth has continued every year since. Leigh's leadership is a large factor in Academy students setting school records for ACT scores, graduation rates, and scholarship funds attained. Without her expertise and drive for constant improvement, none of this would have been possible.

It is without hesitation I recommend Leigh for any position which she is qualified for. Your organization will be all the better for it. Should you need anything further, feel free to contact me using the information provided above.

Sincerely,

Kyle Farner

Kyle Farner
Quality Control Manager
H2 Enterprises



The Academy

11800 Lowell Blvd. Westminster, CO 80031-5097

Phone: 303-289-8088 Fax: 303-289-8087 Website: www.theacademyk12.org

"Pursuing Truth, Wisdom, Excellence"

Recommendation: Leigh Florita

Jan 29, 2019

To whom it may concern;

It is a privilege to write this letter of recommendation for Leigh Florita. I find myself in the position of writing a letter I hope will never get used. Leigh Florita is a consummate professional, a great leader and one of the best administrators I have ever had the pleasure of working with. I met Leigh in 2012 when I was hired as the Executive Director for The Academy. Leigh was the Junior High (JH) Principal and I was her supervisor. I have since moved on to be the Chief of Finance and Operations but still work with Leigh as a member of our senior admin team. I will tell you this, no matter what task needs to be done, Leigh can do it and will do it extremely well.

Leigh Florita is an incredible administrator. She thoroughly understands the balance between building relationships and pushing others to perform at their best. Leigh can be tough when she has to and has had the difficult conversations that go with being a school administrator and leader, but she is always fair and gets the best from her teachers and students alike. Since Leigh has been the JH Principal, we have seen a decrease in teacher turnover and an increase in student growth and achievement. Recently, the Junior High led all levels in the district in achievement by setting record high performances on our mid-year internal academic metrics.

She is more than a great leader. Over the years, I have asked Leigh to oversee our Special Education department, develop a new teacher Induction Program, standardize and oversee our teacher hiring process and be the lead in our schools professional development. She was instrumental in the development of our teacher evaluation process. She led the team that developed the rubrics, trained the evaluators, and worked closely with all involved to ensure standardization across all grade levels. Her skill and success has allowed us to develop a long-range performance driven compensation plan that rewards our best teachers with well above average pay raises.

Most importantly is the commitment and passion that Leigh demonstrates for our students. No matter what role she is filling, and there are many, Leigh never loses sight of the importance of doing what is right for our students and community. No matter what topic our senior admin team is discussing, Leigh is typically the first to advocate for the students and identify potential hazards. The best part is, she not only sees potential issues, but offers great solutions that support our overall PK-12 mission while looking out for the wildcats at every level. I can't say enough to adequately describe the impact she had on our students, our staff, and our families.

As I mentioned earlier, I am writing this letter hoping it will never get used. But if it is used, some organization will have the opportunity to add an incredible leader and administrator to their team. Leigh Florita will be a tremendous asset to any organization and I can give her my strongest possible recommendation for any position she is seeking. If I can be of any further assistance do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

David Floodeen, Chief Finance and Operations Officer
The Academy
David.floodeen@theacademyk12.org



The Academy

Main Campus - 11800 Lowell Blvd., Westminster, CO 80031-5097
North Campus - 12161 Park Centre Drive, Westminster, CO 80234
Phone: 303-289-8088 Fax: 303-289-8087 Website: www.theacademyk12.org

"Pursuing Truth, Wisdom, Excellence"

Mission Statement: "The Academy serves our students to develop college ready, exemplary citizens by promoting excellence in academics, character and relationships."

January 29, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter of recommendation on behalf of Leigh Florita, an exceptional principal and a highly talented educational leader.

I have known Mrs. Florita for six years working under or alongside her that entire time, first as a Spanish teacher, then a professional development TOSA, and finally as her dean of students, a role that, in Colorado, is similar to that of an assistant principal. During our time working together, I have developed a deep personal and professional respect for Mrs. Florita grounded in her unusual talent for an extremely difficult job.

First and foremost, Mrs. Florita does what is right for students. In every conversation, every staff meeting, in each strategic planning session, she is the one to always gently guide our team back to that one essential question, "Is this what's best for kids?" Academics, climate initiatives, discipline, staffing choices - everything is run through this simple filter and by faithfully using it, Mrs. Florita is able to keep her focus, and the school's, on what matters most: the students. Under her guiding hand, the junior high at The Academy has made impressive gains. The overall average junior high GPA has increased by 16.1% during Mrs. Florita's tenure, from 56.5% when she inherited the junior high seven years ago to 72.6% during the 2017-2018 school year. This year, we have hopes for an even greater increase as at semester, our overall junior high score sat at 82% and rising. Increasing GPAs while ensuring leaps are not due to grade inflation has taken a careful mix of years of teacher training, data tracking, and accountability measures that have slowly become an integral part of our school's academic program. She has built a system in which gains are not one-off occurrences, but rather are supported by systemic accountability measures and student support measures built into the junior high structure. Under Mrs. Florita's tenure, math scores have also increased 6.8 points in the 7th grade and 11.9 points in 8th grade in two years. Tardies have decreased by 21% and positive referrals (contact home made for good reasons rather than bad) consistently held at a ratio of 5:1.

One of Mrs. Florita's greatest strengths is her instructional leadership and one of her greatest leadership talents is modeling a "Do as I do," attitude. She holds herself and every other member of the administrative team to the same instructional standards she holds her teachers. Every staff meeting she models instructional practices and explicitly breaks down those practices so that teachers understand why she's doing what she's doing and how they can apply the same practices to their classes. She jumps in to teach classes in a staffing pinch, or just for fun because she misses the day-to-day of being in a classroom. She actively tries new strategies, takes risks, and sometimes, just like the rest of us, goes up in flames when something doesn't go as planned. Rather than gloss over these glitches, she always calls her staff's attention to them as a learning

moment for herself. Her sincerity, her human-ness, and her willingness to hold herself to the same standards as teachers result in her instructional advice being authentic, helpful, and immediately applicable. As a result, the teachers she coaches are more willing to be open about their progress and struggles, and the staff climate is one that operates on a foundation of trust, open communication, and continual growth. All of us can always grow in our craft and talking about that openly is a sign of a strong community.

Above and beyond anything else I have learned from Mrs. Florita, I have learned lessons in grace and patience. Making the transition from teaching to administration is always a big leap, and the first years as a new administrator are filled with what sometimes feels like insurmountable stress and an endless stream of sticky situations. Mrs. Florita has been my calm and level-headed guide in learning to deal with difficult parents, conflict among teachers, heart-breaking student situations, and so many things in between that I never anticipated. More times than I can count, I have been floored by how she takes a deep breath, jumps into the messiest of situations, and brings them to resolution, never losing her cool or becoming flustered. Once, when I asked her how she managed, she sat back and thought for a moment, then answered simply, "I always want everyone who walks into my office to feel heard. It doesn't mean they are going to like my decisions. It doesn't mean I'm not going to ruffle feathers. But I never want someone to leave believing they haven't been listened to." That advice has stuck with me since, and though I still have a long way to go as a leader, I have been lucky to have Mrs. Florita as a mentor these years.

Having worked in secondary schools my entire career I often fill out reference forms and college recommendations for our high school students. Frequently on these forms, at least one question asks for a ranking. "Please rank *student* from level 1-5, with 5 being "top 5% of students encountered in my career." Mrs. Florita is that top 5% of administrators. She demands much of her teachers, has high expectations, and holds everyone - students, teachers, and parents alike - accountable. Yet she also has the same expectations for herself and leads by example with grace and humility. Her leadership produces strong results, and in the process she creates a school where teachers *want* to come to work, where people feel heard, and everyone is part of the community.

I highly recommend Leigh Florita. She would be a wonderful addition to your organization. I sincerely hope you will consider her for your open positions, and I would be happy to provide any additional information at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "LeeAnne Sanders".

LeeAnne Sanders
Dean of Students
303.289.8088 ext. 210
leeanne.sanders@theacademyk12.org

Northstar Correctional Education Services

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December 28, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

After nearly 40 years as an educator in public, prison, and charter schools, I know a stellar educator when I work with one. Leigh Florita is exceptional.

I filled in for a departing 7th grade teacher for a semester working for Leigh at The Academy of Charter Schools. She offered me the job several times before I agreed to take it. It was her enthusiasm and persistence that eventually convinced me. I have been at The Academy “temporarily” now for almost four years and she is one of the biggest reasons I stay.

One of the first questions Leigh asked me in my interview for the 7th grade position was, “Are you coachable?” I am decidedly *not* coachable by most standards. I worked as a school principal on death row in a maximum security prison for many years. That kind of chronic stress and physical danger either hones an educator into a passionate advocate for change or eats you alive. Leigh matches my passion for education at every step and embraced both my experience and expertise. She has the confidence to allow others to shine. She is a fierce advocate for diversity and equity. She leads with both grace and grit. I watched her put aside her personal preferences for the greater good more than once.

Leigh is personable and agile in her management of people. She mentors younger teachers carefully without micromanaging and gives seasoned teachers the support needed to excel. She strikes an appropriate balance between innovation and established protocols. When I implemented a late-work alternative that essentially broke with the school’s customary policy, she listened and supported my position because she observed its success with my students. She holds teachers accountable without being dogmatic. She is a grey thinker, a *both/and* person who is able to entertain divergent elements simultaneously. In the world of education, where too often thinking is black-and-white, she is refreshing.

She mediates among parents, teachers, and students effortlessly, even when emotions are running high and sides are being taken. She listens, summarizes, and finds workable compromises for all involved ... all without sacrificing either excellence or relationships. She is well-grounded in education research and best practices and supports change with proven principles.

Leigh delegates and empowers while actively engaging in the work. She acts decisively and isn’t afraid to admit when she’s wrong. If I were to choose something she struggles with, it would be her empathy. She cares about her teachers, her team, her students, her families. At times she needs to make decisions which are unpopular or resisted. She proceeds undaunted, but she struggles with the human consequences.

My business partner and I have occasionally sought her assistance on large projects and she has never disappointed. I recommend her with enthusiasm for any position she seeks.



Cindy Borden