

To whom it may concern,

My name is Logan Bourke and I have worked as a math teacher at Eastern high school for ten years. There I teach Algebra 2 co-taught, Pre-Calculus, and Statistics to Junior and Senior students. In past years, I have also taught Algebra 1 and Geometry. I wish to be trained as a mentor because education has given me so much that I feel as though it is time for me to give back by assisting others who wish to benefit as I have as they join the profession. I believe that I have a unique perspective on mathematics education, one that I feel is worth sharing with new educators and that I wish to see implemented in more classrooms. I also possess several strengths that I feel will make me a strong candidate for mentorship. I am very reflective of my own practice, participate in non-mandated professional activities, am able to work cooperatively as a team member to aid the growth of students, and have worked to improve the induction of student teachers in the past.

When I say that education has given me so much, I don't believe that I can ever truly comprehend myself how much it actually has given me. My mother was the first in my family to attend college and made sure to reinforce the importance of working hard in school. I followed her directions blindly and can only now see all the benefits that doing has led to as I look back on my journey to where I am. In Mrs. V's poetry class, I learned to love reading. In Mr. W's Calculus class, I learned that I could persevere through any challenge if I worked hard enough. During tennis practice, I learned the importance of exercise and corrected many unhealthy habits that I had begun to fall into. At the first college I attended, I learned that I wanted to be a teacher and at CCSU, I met my wife. Now, within my role as a teacher, I feel it is important to help others benefit from their education. I try my best to incorporate assignments that address multiple modalities, so that the artists can express themselves. I work to create rigorous lessons, so that even the highest achieving students are challenged. I coach tennis, running it as a no-cut program that accepts all willing participants. Last, but not least, I encourage each of my students to continue their education well after graduation because you truly do not know how far it can take you. I wish to be trained as a mentor so that they can do even more to help other individuals benefit from a system that has given me so much.

Every now and then a current student of mine will ask why I became a math teacher and it always seems to surprise them when I say that I hated math growing up. Math class was always boring. I absentmindedly copied down any notes that were being written on the chalkboard and when my teacher asked if anyone had any questions, I was always too afraid to seek assistance by speaking up. After school, I would stare blankly at my homework, unable to make sense of my notes, feeling helpless with no person or resource that I could turn to for help. I wanted to do well each year and I tried really hard, but more often than not, I just couldn't retain what was being covered in math class.

That was at least, until I took Calculus during my senior year of high school. Despite being the most challenging math course I had taken up to that point, Calculus did something that no other math course had ever done. It challenged me to use what we had learned to solve real world problems. Solving one problem gave me a framework that I could apply to another problem and soon a wealth of understanding developed. Suddenly, retention was less difficult. I began to seek out additional challenges, and math eventually became my favorite subject. As a teacher, I believe that my past experiences have given me a unique perspective on mathematics education that I now try to utilize working as a mathematics teacher. Each day, I work very hard to help my students connect what we are learning in class to the real world. For example, my Algebra 1 class will be asked to determine how long it will take for them to earn enough money to buy a car, my Geometry students will approximate how tall they would be if they suddenly turned into the Hulk, and my Statistics students design and play unfair games, similar to that which casino's use to guarantee that they make a profit. By giving my students several opportunities throughout the year to make such connections, I believe they engage with each lesson more productively, retain the material more effectively, and are more willing to seek assistance if and when they need it. They may also, at least a teacher can hope, derive some enjoyment every now and then. It isn't always easy, but it almost always seems as though it is time well spent because I've seen time and time again that if the students can see themselves in their work, they can persevere and succeed through any challenge. I believe this mindset is my greatest strength as a math teacher. As a mentor I would work to assist a beginning teacher see how to help their students make these connections so that more students can benefit from that which helped me most in my own mathematics education. .

While my past experiences have shaped my perspective and how I approach each lesson, I believe I also possess certain additional qualities that are needed to be a mentor. In particular, I believe that I have an affinity for self-reflection. After each lesson, I make notes about how the lesson went and how it could be changed in the future. Then during the following year, I look back on my notes and make any adjustments I believe would best meet the needs of that year's students. It is rare that I give the exact same lesson in two consecutive years as I believe improvement can always be made.

Additionally, I actively seek out professional development opportunities to address weaknesses that I have identified in my own pedagogy. I, for example, signed up to join our districts Dine and Discuss on Grading for Equity, by Joe Feldmen. After receiving the text last year, I read it over the summer and immediately implemented a more equitable grading methodology in my own classroom. Now, my students are no longer given homework, their mastery of each unit standard is assessed on a five point scale, and they are given multiple opportunities throughout each unit to demonstrate mastery of each standard. When informally surveyed throughout the past year, students are very

pleased with how they are assessed, feel it is fair, and feel as though it encourages them to work towards mastery rather than merely check off a to-do item by submitting an assignment. The feedback from parents has been positive as well. It has taken some time for them to understand that each grade represents mastery of a standard, but once they do, they feel empowered to connect their child's grade to a particular missing assignment in Google Classroom and are satisfied when mastery is achieved. This summer I have also applied to a professional development session run through the University of New Haven to better prepare myself to teach a new course that we will be offering next year and I have applied to begin my sixth-year certificate at UCONN to learn more about technology within the classroom.

Within my classroom, the math department, the school, and our district itself, I have managed to work cooperatively within several teams to assist in the development of students. I have been fortunate to work with two very strong coteachers and value the time I spend working alongside them. Thomas Montague, in particular, just plain makes me a better math teacher. During class, he teaches alongside me and we play off one another in front of the students. I will show them one way to solve a problem and he will show them "a better way". He will make a mistake on purpose and I will ask if any student can "help him out". Activities such as these challenge the students to analyze multiple methods and critique the rationale of others. Before each class, I will propose an approach to the next topic and he will either agree wholeheartedly or challenge my decision and work with me to find an approach that works for all the diverse needs of our students. Outside of the classroom, I work collaboratively with two colleagues as advisors in our school's Lancer Nation group. As advisors, we work to train juniors and seniors as mentors to underclassmen. These students go into freshmen and sophomore advisory homerooms to facilitate activities and offer advice. The results seem to speak for themselves as a majority of our current mentors were once underclassmen who had a Lancer Nation mentor of their own at some point. Although it has taken me some time to connect so well with a colleague such as Tom and to see the results of our Lancer Nation efforts, I am confident that I can develop a working relationship that encourages productive collaboration with a beginning teacher.

Last but not least of my qualities that I believe are necessary to be a mentor, is my commitment to improve teacher induction processes. On two occasions I have been asked to work with students preparing to enter the teaching profession. I completed much of my initial observation time at New Britain High School. Prior to beginning my own student teaching experience, I was asked to speak in front of a class of CCSU students preparing to begin their observations. My cooperating teacher expressed that I had been the only observer of hers to ask to take a more active role within the class and help students alongside her. She wanted to encourage such behavior in future groups and put

my name forward to the CCSU professor running that semester's observations. After completion of my own student teaching experience, I was then asked to speak in front of a newer cohort and to serve as a mentor making myself available to their questions and concerns. I was asked by the head of the math department, Dr. Robyn Kalder, to share anecdotes of my first few months working as a teacher at Pulaski Middle School in New Britain. I found both experience very rewarding and hope that I can continue to provide additional insight to these beginning teachers.

After ten years of what I consider to be a successful teaching career, I believe I am prepared to take on additional challenges and to share all that I have learned. As the adage goes, you don't really understand something well unless you can teach it. As a mentor I hope to both reflect on my own teaching practice, as well as, help a future colleague find their own voice within the classroom. I wish to be trained as a mentor so that I can share what I have learned about engaging students within real-world learning situations. I believe I have several qualities that would make me a successful mentor and feel confident that this training will help provide me with the relevant knowledge that I need to succeed. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
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