

April 24, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Ericka Burey and I am a first-year teacher at Robert T. Hill Middle School in the Dallas ISD system. I am currently the sole teacher of record for Sixth grade Social Studies: World Cultures and I'm also in the process of receiving my alternative certification. Gordon Morriss served as my "unofficial" mentor and the person in charge of our campus' "New Teacher Academy" for the 2019-2020 school year.

As a first year brand new teacher I had little to no idea of what exactly I was getting myself into starting off the year. From the very beginning, Gordon Morriss (aka "Morriss") was a beacon of shining light ready to help wherever he could. I had the great fortune (and luck) to be in the classroom next to him as well. To say that he "helped" me throughout the year is a severe understatement. The following are just a few areas where he provided guidance:

1) Classroom Management.

- a. To everyone, Morriss made himself readily available to ask questions, run ideas by, work through possible lesson plans/projects, etc. regardless of content area. But, for me, his advice regarding classroom management was the most significant. In DISD, and education in general, classroom management is key. As a first-year teacher, it is so pivotal to becoming an effective educator that you "control" the learning environment. This was my biggest struggle area throughout the year. But regardless of the situation, Morriss was able to effectively communicate with me realistic expectations as well as just be there to listen when I had a particularly "rough" day. He has a great way of putting everything into perspective and keeping me grounded in my "why." He was not only able to offer me tried-and-true procedures that worked for him but also effectively and productively offer me suggestions on how I could improve. I never once felt criticized or discouraged after a conversation with Morriss; it was actually quite the opposite in that I felt better that I wasn't alone in my "failings" but rather energized to come back and fight another day.

2) First-year Experience and Alternative Certification Advice

- a. As a first-year teacher, I very much felt as though I were the proverbial “deer in headlights.” I did not know what to expect nor was I prepared for the reality. But Morriss was there throughout the process to ease the anxiety and provide positive feedback in what I was doing right, which is a monumental trait in any good leader. He was able to deliver relatable experiences he had and also convey that everything I was going through was “perfectly normal.” There was a definite trust and credibility to his advice and leadership. For me, this was best demonstrated by his background as an alternatively certified teacher and his willingness to help develop future teachers. He was able to help me and my other first-years successfully navigate our programs. He went above and beyond in so much that he would look over our observation reports, come and observe our classes in his off periods, communicate with our evaluators and talk with us as much as we needed to make sure that we were constantly improving our skill set and optimizing our scores. He also did it in a way that was not only positive but encouraging.

3) On and Off the court Assistance

- a. In addition to being a core subject teacher I am also a coach for two separate sports as well as the Assistant Debate Coach. Looking back at it now, I most definitely bit off more than I could chew my first year however Morriss, being the positive mentor that he is, was able to keep me from pulling my hair out. He not only advised me on how to get through the first year of teaching but also how to work in the educational environment. For those of you that know, sometimes half the battle of teaching is not the kids but rather the adults. Every workplace is unique and comes with their own specific challenges, each campus or district is no different. Morriss was instrumental in helping me navigate this aspect of teaching.

Some of the best qualities that Morriss possesses include his trustworthiness and his natural leadership. People, myself included, naturally gravitate to his leadership style, his ability to advocate for teachers and students as well as his talent for saying what we’re all thinking but in a diplomatic manner. For me specifically, he was one of my biggest cheerleaders. As a first-year teacher, we haven’t necessarily found our “voice” yet in regard to disagreement with the administration or simply standing up for ourselves. Morriss has a

spectacular ability to successfully convey his disagreement with a certain strategy or idea but also offer possible solutions that serve the greater good, the students. He is able to see the potential in new teachers and look at the “big picture” which makes his specific perspective invaluable. He truly is a teacher’s teacher. I know, without a doubt, that he has the best interest of the school, the students and the staff in the fore front at all times.

These are just a few of the areas I have had the opportunity to witness Morriss in action. To say that Gordon Morriss is just a teacher is a drastic understatement. In the short time that I have been able to work with him he has always gone above and beyond in anything he takes on or is asked to do. He truly enjoys being a mentor, a coach and mostly an educator. This is demonstrated every day he comes to work. It has been an absolute pleasure getting to work with him and I am very fortunate that there are educators like him to learn from and to hopefully, one day, be more like.

Sincerely,

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