

TEACHER FEATURE: ERIN LUZADDER



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For Palatine High School math teacher Erin Luzadder, her everyday challenges don’t necessarily revolve around geometry, algebra, or calculus specifically. Her tasks are finding ways to engage students to think beyond the subject, and encourage her students to apply critical thinking when X, Y, and Z aren’t making sense.

“I kick off the year with the same expectation that everyone can be successful. I try to be very positive. It’s about thinking and believing you can be successful and enjoy the environment,” Luzadder said. “I believe it is my job to find a buy-in to help students be successful. They may not be as passionate as I am about mathematics, but if they like the class, they will be open to learning the material.”



Luzadder said having her TA Sandy Saltess (left) in the classroom is a huge advantage, and helps foster

| a positive educational environment
| in the classroom.

Luzadder, who is a National Board Certified teacher and has taught at PHS for 12 years, pushes her students to their fullest potential, and makes sure they understand someone cares about them. In addition to going to school for education and math, she also holds a master's degree in counseling. That helps her with programs outside of the classroom, such as being a TEAM Coordinator (Teaching, Encouraging, and Mentoring), which pairs a teacher and a student outside the classroom to build positive connections to PHS. Luzadder also is the freshman class sponsor.

"TEAM is to bring students into the world of PHS," Luzadder said. "We have so many kids that go through their day and don't feel connected."

Bringing a mentoring aspect into the classroom isn't always easy. Luzadder recalls a particularly difficult time last year when she had many troubled students in her class. That's when a co-worker of hers sent her a Maya Angelou quote that now sums up her personal teaching philosophy: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."



Luzadder poses with two of her mentees, Elizabeth Segura (left) and Jazmin Rodriguez.

"Students who believe that you care about their well-being and see that you enjoy teaching them are more likely to make good choices with regard to coursework and passing their classes," she said. "I enjoy math, but I enjoy being with students more. For me, it's more about the kids and less about the subject."

It's important to Luzadder to make each of her students feel appreciated and that they are worth allowing themselves to excel in education. She said that tone is the theme and goal in the math department, and cites a family environment for helping with that mission.

"People are concerned about your well-being, and they want to know how things are going outside of the classroom and school," Luzadder said. "When things go wrong, we have amazing amounts of support for each other. We have amazing resources, and it's the best of both worlds. We're helping some needy kids, but we are supported by good administrators and technology. We keep it a team effort, and we are lucky that we

have a lot of communication with teacher assistants and administrators, and that helps all of us to be successful.”