

TEACHER FEATURE: PHS' SUE QUINLAN

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As an advocate for diversity and programs that support the multicultural population at Palatine High School, Sue Quinlan has spent much of her educational career trying to help students embrace opportunities that can enrich their lives. While she traveled abroad as an exchange student in high school and studied international relations in college, she has spent much of her life as a teacher and high school counselor in Palatine Township District 211 helping students learn more about themselves as they explore the world of options available to them today.

With more than 33 years in the district, Quinlan has impacted the lives of many students through her dedication and commitment as a school counselor with a drive to spearhead initiatives that help them develop the skills and the confidence to succeed. Now, in her final year before retirement, Quinlan reflects on how important it is for teachers to have a positive attitude in dealing with students, particularly with those who face hardships outside of school.

"I believe that every student is capable, and it's just a matter of helping them realize those capabilities," Quinlan said. "I always work with students to push themselves. It's about learning, but sometimes they come to school and it's about a whole bunch of other outside factors for them. Trying to help students maintain their focus on education by continually supporting and believing in them is what I try to do. "

After working for the VISTA (Volunteers In Service To American) program and the Peace

Corps, Quinlan started her educational career in District 211 at Conant High School, teaching Social Science Survey and Psychology. When her interest in Psychology increased, she received her master's degree in guidance and counseling and moved to Palatine High School. Over the years, she has worked with others to develop several positive initiatives that continue making an impact at PHS and throughout the district, including Project Excel, Palatine's Promise, TRUST Peer Counseling and TEAM Student/Faculty Mentoring. Additionally, she helped to write the proposals for the Blue Ribbon, American Schools, and Drug Free School honors won by PHS. She received the Golden Apple with the district team charged with initiating RtI. Recently, she received a Sonya Peterson Award in recognition of her leadership, community service and compassion for at-risk youth and families from the Barrington-Palatine Child and Adolescent Local Area Network.

Helping students stay on track with their schoolwork even when home life might be a bit tough is Quinlan's motivation. She said many at-risk students (students who are at-risk of failing classes or dropping out of school) that she saw freshman year have turned out to be exceptional students. Programs such as Project Excel have helped Quinlan make a connection with her students, and let them know someone is on their side.

"I can't imagine retiring, to be honest, because I come to school every day and I love what I do," she said. "Yes, there are ups and downs just as with every job, but on days when I am feeling frustrated, I look at the kids. They are waiting for me as I walk in the door sometimes, and it's good to know that they know I am always willing to help."

And the students are always full of surprises, such as the time a group of seniors told her she made a difference in their lives by telling them "no." Quinlan, who strives to be positive when working with her students, was surprised at their response. "What are you talking about," she said to the students, "I never say no to you guys for anything." "That's not true," they countered, "when we want to drop an AP class, you tell us no. When we feel like we want to work more hours instead of studying, you say no.' When we want a boyfriend or girlfriend.. "



Sue Quinlan addresses students in Project Excel.

"I realized that in problem solving, and encouraging them to think through difficult choices, it sometimes sounds like no," Quinlan said. "It's really not about 'no' but about making good choices and looking at all of the options. I am so proud that, in

the end, those seniors stayed in school and have gone on to college, scholarships in hand.”

Quinlan realized what an impact she had on some of her students when they approached Principal Gary Steiger about finding a counselor to continue working with Project Excel. They told him how the support and encouragement they experienced with the Project Excel staff and other Excel students kept them in school and helped them to focus on their future. “After meeting with the students, Mr. Steiger came to me and said, ‘You have changed lives’. That affirmation was one of the best moments of my career,” Quinlan said.

Even though she wishes that she could help every student to be successful, Quinlan understands she can only do her part. After she provides support and encouragement, or helps brainstorm options, it is up to the students to make it happen. And once they identify their dream, she encourages them to go after it, no matter what obstacles may be in their path.

“I have worked very hard on numerous initiatives to help improve PHS for our students, and in the last year or two everything has come together,” Quinlan said. “I am lucky. Usually people go through their careers, and then they’re done and leave. I have seen PHS continually change and strive to improve the educational opportunities for kids, and that is very cool.”

TEACHER FEATURE: HEHS’ RYAN BROWN

“Students see that the things they learned here at HEHS and with me, whether it’s in the gym, through other activities, or in the classroom, have benefitted them in life. That is the whole reason that I am doing this.”



When Ryan Brown was a student at Hoffman Estates High School, little did he know he would return to walk the halls again as a teacher and coach. Although he had dreams of becoming a doctor and breaking the family mold of working in education, he realized his true passion is for writing, literature, and books.

“When I got through my senior year, Kathy Wandro [retired HEHS teacher] was my teacher, and it was at that point I realized I wanted to teach,” Brown said. “She had so much passion for the things she was doing, and I saw that every day when she came to school she was having fun, and that was one of the things that I wanted to make sure I was doing.”

After spending some time working at the middle school level, he took his experience and set a goal on teaching at HEHS. Once he landed a position teaching English, he knew District 211 was the place he wanted to be.

“I look at the people who are around me and they care so much about this school and the students that there is energy in this building that I don’t know other people have ever felt anywhere before,” Brown said. “I couldn’t imagine working anywhere else, and I definitely pride myself on being a D211 teacher, but being a teacher at HEHS has fulfilled me and it’s because I work with so many wonderful people.”

Brown is heavily involved with HEHS outside of the classroom. In addition to teaching freshman and AP English, he is head coach of the boy’s gymnastics team, the same team he was on during high school, sponsor of the literary magazine: *Directions*, sponsor for Peers and Leaders/Helping Other People Everywhere (PALS/HOPE) and is the assistant adviser to Student Council. Brown said he loves being involved with these programs because of the diversity in students who represent HEHS, and the opportunity to give back to the school and community through volunteer work and scholarships. One commemorative scholarship through PALS is in honor of former PALS president Nirman Vasanwala who died while in college. Brown said the scholarship keeps Vasanwala’s ideas alive.

“Every time I think of my plate being too full or doing too much, I think about how hard Nirman worked, and I also think about not being able to give that scholarship away to students,” Brown said. “I know that is what I am supposed to do, and we come in contact with some great kids in PALS that are yearning to do so much more for the community and world.”



From left to right: Ruben Cabrera, Nick Cannella, Ryan Brown, Marc

Malinowski, and Josh Parado during the Academic Scholars dinner. Those students are not only on the gymnastics team, but also in Brown's class.

Brown uses the same teaching techniques in the classroom and gymnasium, although he said the two are very different. During gymnastics, he is able to create a bond and trust with his student-athletes that are different from the classroom. His student-athletes need to be mentally sound before they start trying new moves in the gym, and that is why Brown said the team talks a lot and maintains a high level of trust. In the classroom, he has his students “check in” before class starts by stating a number to represent how they are feeling for the day. Sometimes when the class seems to be struggling that day, it influences lessons or the teaching approach he uses.

Those approaches and connections with his students are important to Brown because each student needs to feel that bit of individual attention, even if it’s just saying hello to a student when they pass by. That’s why he said one of the aspects of teaching that makes him feel proudest is hearing from his students after they have already graduated.

“I get a lot of letters, emails, and Facebook messages from former students who, down the road, look back and tell me the impact that I had on them as a teacher,” Brown said. “They see that the things they learned here at HEHS and with me, whether it’s in the gym, through other activities, or in the classroom, have benefitted them in life. That is the whole reason that I am doing this.”

TEACHER FEATURE: JIM GUEST



“In life, we are constantly challenged. I try to break down those challenges into small parts. As the student starts to have success, they become motivated to continue to accomplish more.”

Since he was 10 years old, Fremd High School teacher Jim Guest said he knew he wanted to work in athletics, and when he was in high school he knew he wanted to teach at the high school level. That’s exactly what he did. In fact, when he was offered a position to teach at the collegiate level, he respectfully declined and stayed true to himself by continuing to teach high school students.

After 11 years of teaching at Fremd, the former head gymnastics coach and driver’s education department chair said he still loves what he is doing. His dedication to helping students find the motivation to succeed is something he prides himself on.

He retired from coaching after seven years, and despite it being what he calls a tough but right decision, he continues to find education exciting to be involved in. Guest emphasizes that teachers are there to help the kids, and to help them when they encounter a tough time.

“In life, we are constantly challenged,” Guest said. “I try to break down those challenges into small parts. As the student starts to have success, they become motivated to continue to accomplish more.”

Guest suffered a series of coaching injuries that led to his decision to retire. After retiring, he is finding other ways to keep involved with students outside of the classroom. He is the faculty adviser to the chess team and is implementing new programs within the driver’s education department. The Alive at 25 program focuses on defensive driving tactics and choices as they relate to the topics of driving distractions, driver fatigue, and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

During his time as head coach from 2005 to 2011, the Vikings saw great success. His teams won state championships in 2005, 2007, and 2008, placed second in 2006, and third in 2010. His overall meet record at the time he retired was an incredible 62-3. Guest also was inducted into the Illinois High School Gymnastics Coaches Association Hall of Fame. Although he recognizes the team’s success, he said it’s the hard work that happens in the gym and classroom that makes it worthwhile.

“In terms of the final score at the end of a gymnastics meet, I have had success beyond my wildest imagination. Coaching gymnastics has been a great period in my life,” Guest said. “I have been asked which was my best team, best athlete, etc. My response has always been to ask me in 20 years when I can see what positive contributions my athletes have made in their lives and to our society.”

As he continues teaching, Guest said the end of coaching still has a bittersweet feeling because it’s a feeling and satisfaction unique to athletics.

“Coaching athletics and specifically gymnastics has been a big part of my life,” Guest said. “The last 20 years have been a great period of time for me. Just the whole environment, the atmosphere – you can’t manufacture it in any other field other than athletics.”

TEACHER FEATURE: ERIN LUZADDER



“I enjoy math, but I enjoy being with students more. For me, it’s more about the kids and less about the subject.”

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

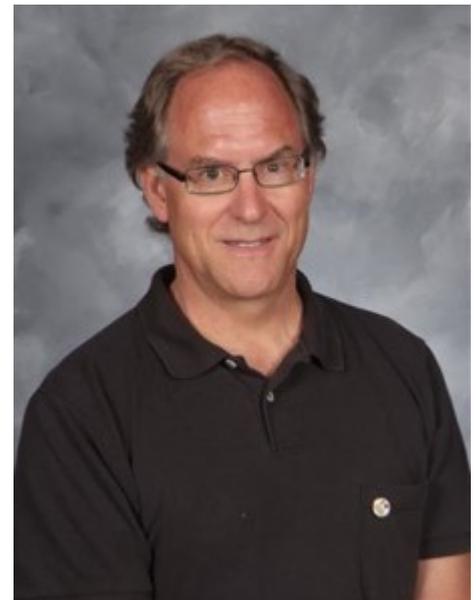
teaching them are more likely to make good choices with regard to coursework and passing their classes,” she said. “I enjoy math, but I enjoy being with students more. For me, it’s more about the kids and less about the subject.”

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.”

TEACHER FEATURE: KEN TURNER

“I think science is a tool and a lens that can be used to help understand life around you.”



Ken Turner didn’t plan on teaching. In fact, he imagined being a veterinarian, the proud owner of doughnut shop or even a landlord. For him, the possibilities were endless, and he wasn’t in a hurry to pick one major.

“I was all over the board, and it wasn’t until my junior year of college when I finally picked my major and teaching, so there is hope for those who make late decisions,” he laughed.

Now, after 22 years of teaching science at Schaumburg High School, Turner is an innovator in the educational field not only because of teaching, but also by studying nanotechnology and material science, and applying it to the high school level. Turner also said he enjoys how science allows students to use it to other aspects of their lives outside of the classroom.

“I think science is a tool and a lens that can be used to help understand life around you,” Turner said. “Not everyone will grow up to be a scientist, but you need to be able to grasp science and use it to understand what happens in the world all your life.”



Ken Turner and colleague Kerry Frost co-teach Chemistry of Foods together.

Turner teaches physical science, freshman biology, and a course he helped create and co-teaches with his colleague, Kerry Frost, called Chemistry of Foods. He is involved with Materials World Modules (MWM) at Northwestern University, which is an educational program that strives to increase literacy in mathematics and science through material science and nanotechnology. Additionally, he has published works on science specifically for the high school level, received numerous awards and grants, and has led and presented at several conferences.

Although he has many accomplishments – to name a few, he was recognized with an Illinois State Board of Education “Those Who Excel” award three times, won a Toyota Tapestry Award as project manager, and a United States Fish and Wildlife Service Partnership Award – Turner remains humble and values some of the simpler aspects of life.

“I’ve been very fortunate to be recognized and win awards that I never knew existed,” he said. “Like the ‘Those Who Excel’ awards. There is nothing that justifies me having that, but I am so proud and humbled that the District would honor me in that way.”

However, he said it all comes back to teaching students and interacting with his colleagues. Connecting students to science through projects and watching them apply it to real life is a part of teaching Turner said he enjoys most, especially for students who aren't interested in the subject.

"Professionally, I am most proud of being a part of faculty at a school and in a district where innovation is expected and a source of pride," Turner said. "It's a place where so many wonderful teachers come to work with me every day, and where I can build off of their knowledge. Every single one of my awards didn't occur out of a vacuum. It occurred with help from all sorts of people."

After the final bell rings at the end of the day, he said his biggest accomplishment in life is his family.

"My family is my source of happiness. To be able to come home and see my children, they are ages 12 to 23, and even see the ones who aren't home, just makes me so happy. They have different things they are proud of. I'm not sure if any of them are picking science, but I am only a little sad about that," he laughed.