



Letter of Recommendation for Jim Burwell

Jim Burwell joined the English Department here at Country Day School in San Jose, Costa Rica in August of 2009. As a fellow-member of the department, I have found Jim to be a very dedicated, creative professional, someone who cares about students and who is warm and positive to work with.

Just a few days after beginning here at CDS, Jim encouraged all of us in the English Department to freshly align our English curriculum with the school's standards. Indeed, he located the pertinent standards documents and made sure they were available to us all. In other words, Jim did not show up and merely "do his thing" as a teacher, but instead was careful to keep in step with the existing program while quietly encouraging improvement. In this, Jim has demonstrated work and talent both in teaching and administration. I have also seen Jim quietly come alongside our young high school principal and offer him encouragement and support in his administrative duties. Although Jim's AP teaching load was heavy, he didn't hesitate to take on sponsorship of the Student Council—a substantial time commitment. His work with these student leaders has shown an excellent touch. He has been able to inspire them to promote higher levels of school spirit than we have seen in many years while making sure that this work has remained student organized and student centered. Jim also initiated a mentoring program in which high school seniors are paired with incoming freshman. The older students help the younger ones with transitions to high school, everything from preparing for tests and keeping a homework agenda to how to best adjust to various teachers and their classes. Jim researched the nature of this need and organized meetings with students and teachers about ways to meet that need. This was quite successful, something I hope we can continue here for years to come.

I have been a teacher for 25 years, and Jim shows an energy for professional development that I have seen in very few teachers. He is up-to-date and well-read in educational journals, often citing current research with respect to best practices and developing trends. He has also been a leader among all the teachers in the high school with respect to creatively improving our use of technology. This has influenced us both in how we teach and in what we teach. For example, Jim shaped his creative writing course around the tools available in *wikispaces* and *glogster* such that student work is both available for others to enjoy and at the same kept in a digital portfolio which archives that work through a student's entire time at the school. It's an idea that is now being put into practice at all levels here at

CDS. Jim also helped me personally as he showed me ways to organize student notebooks in a completely digital format—no more do I need to carry boxes of binders home for grading! It was for reasons such as these that Jim won the Innovative Teacher of the Year award here at CDS.

Jim is also a pleasure to work with. I can comfortably drop-in on him and ask questions, bounce ideas around, and seek his wisdom about how to handle a certain subject matter or classroom circumstance. Likewise, he drops-in to discuss ideas and issues he is pondering or planning. This approachability extends to students; it is common to see him sitting and talking with students outside of class. I am sad to see Jim leave our school, but I know that he will be a very valuable addition to whatever school he goes to next. It's a pleasure and a privilege to recommend Jim highly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Gamble". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Douglas Gamble, Country Day School

October 19, 2011