

Edwin Parr nominee shares heart-felt connection with Hugh Sutherland students

For Immediate Release, April 7, 2021: Meaghan Halkyard knew from her first day of teaching that the best way to build success was to ensure each student who entered her classroom knew they were loved.

“Relationships first - checking in with every single student every day and enjoying a deep connection to learning together – that’s how I approach teaching. It’s also the best part of my job!” said Meaghan, who teaches high school English and Social Studies at Hugh Sutherland School in Carstairs.

“It’s really important to me that my students feel loved and accepted and ready to achieve. Our students are amazingly kind and resilient. Even through the current restrictions, they’re finding ways to be engaged in their work and helpful to each other. They just have a mindset that they can succeed, and this year they are relying on the supports around them to help them move forward. I’m so glad to be working in a division where wellness is part of the culture. I see every day that it brings hope to people.”

Meaghan feels this wellness priority is present in each of her classes. She is inspired by the young people in her classroom, who show a responsibility for their own wellness by taking time for themselves and talking openly about mental health. At the same time, they are committed to supporting the wellness of others, as they prioritize social justice and equity issues.

“They have such a healthy approach to things and I’m learning from them every day. It actually helps with my own resiliency, because I’m teaching a full course load of four core subjects which can be a challenge in the first year. But I’m always happy to be here,” said Meaghan, who also lends her time to additional student activities such as the school’s GSA.

“The Carstairs community is overwhelmingly full of support and kindness, and I get many messages from grateful parents. Even being nominated for this award is such an honour and a gesture of kindness. I love the focus on wellness, respect and kindness in Chinook’s Edge, because I believe it supports student success. Kids belong everywhere, in every space, no matter who they are.”

Meaghan grew up in Cochrane and is a University of Calgary grad. She calls the outdoors her happy place and finds her work/life balance in nature. In her formal observation, Division Principal Jody Dennis referred to Meaghan as ‘an exceptional member of the Hugh Sutherland high school humanities professional learning community.’

“Meaghan participated in the division’s New Teacher Orientation, she engages in career-long learning, she thoughtfully reflects after each lesson to improve on the next,” said Jody. “What is truly key to her success is her ability to form deep relationships. She has worked to establish a home-school partnership with parents and she’s eager to become involved in school-based activities outside the classroom.

“Most importantly, Meaghan devotes herself completely to her students. She has clear expectations and is meticulously prepared for lessons, which allows her to transition seamlessly from one activity to another. She has a talent for encouraging students to go deeper in their understanding of concepts and much is accomplished in her classroom, because they know she cares about them. She exhibits the strategies of a Master Teacher.”

The ASBA Edwin Parr Award recognizes teachers who are new to the profession who show significant promise in their first year. Each of the eight school divisions in Zone 4 select a nominee to be honoured at the annual Edwin Parr event, which will be a virtual celebration this year on May 31.