

## An Open Letter of Gratitude to the Garden Hills Community,

It has been an honor to call Garden Hills Elementary my new home for the 2017-2018 school year. In the words of my mom and grandmother, "Thankfulness should always be seen in your actions, heard in your voice, and written by hand!" I am so thankful to this awesome community for the love, support, and kindness you have shown me as I have settled into my role of crazy new art teacher. As we approach the beginning of summer, I am reflective of my year of 'firsts' at the Hills.

In my 13 years of education, I have always been in the foreground of the school. The art room has always been in direct sight of major school hubs like the cafeteria, the media center, and the front office, but as I unpacked boxes and added some splashes of color to the walls of the Garden Hills' art room, I was nervous about being in a detached building. It was a 'first' to be separate, removed, and away! I had FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). If my classroom was away from the action how would people get to know me, see the kids' progress, and make connections through relationship building? Coach Johnson and Ms. Green, the Physical Education Duo, immediately filled our little part of the world with kindness and laughter. To my closest co-workers who live next door in the gym, thank you for quickly extinguishing my early fears. The personal stories and tales of great educational feats has been the highlight to my lunchtime and Fun Fridays! To the larger community of colleagues in the main building of the Hills, thank you for welcoming me with a robust round of applause at pre-planning, inviting me to social outings, taking note of the artwork in the hallways, and peeking in my classroom with excitement during clean-up time! I know we are all tired and ready for the last bell of dismissal, but it has been amazing to work with a dedicated staff of smiling faces that encourage each other to support the development of great kids!

Another 'first' this year, I was invited to the PTA's Friday board meeting! Previously, my PTA involvement was to simply pay my dues and eat amazing food a few times a year. I never witnessed the planning or management of THE PTA! The endless hours, committees, weekends, weekdays, lists, food orders, t-shirt orders, and pure LOVE that exudes not just from the PTA but also in Acorns to Oaks and EVERY parent at Garden Hills, I say, "Thank You!" Thank you for being dedicated to the learning environment of your students. The comradery and community between staff and parents is a shining example of the notion, "It takes a village"! During my 'first' Evening in the Garden event, Kerry Dyer gave an analogy that our District provides the funds to create a school's foundation, a home, with essential items like teachers, desk, windows, and walls while the parent organizations are able to enhance the house with decorations like field trips and classroom grants. I am grateful to work in a colorful community that is vibrant and alive with activities that support the value of education.

My last 'first' to give thanks for is my name. During my first days at the Hills, students were trying to wrap their brains around my last name. Two names have emerged from the 527 voices: Ms. Dr. and Dr. E. I love both equally. Then recently during Fine Arts Night, my mom was collecting money hearing stories and admiration for Dr. E. After leaving that night, my mom and I discussed how proud she was of my hard word and the funny sound of Dr. E. Spending nearly 24 years as a student in school, I take an enormous amount of pride in my work, my students, and now my name! I always thought, "Well I am just an art teacher." I am more; I am Dr. E! Thank you for an amazing first year of learning and growing in the Hills!

Sincerely,

Dr. Sarah A. Giverson