**Dear Beginning Teacher at HASD**,

Welcome to the Hortonville Area School District! In this school, you are expected to take an intense personal interest in the success of all of our students. You could never help all students learn if you work in isolation, so you will become a member of a collaborative team – colleagues who work interdependently to achieve a common goal for which they are mutually accountable. One of the most important responsibilities of every member of this staff is to make positive contributions to his or her team. You will be assigned a mentor to assist with your transition to our school, but you will find the collaborative culture of your weekly team meeting to be a major source of support as you work your way through the daily questions and challenges confronting a teacher.

Equity is an important issue in this school. You will find that teams work continuously to ensure all students in the same course have access to the same knowledge and skills and have their work assessed according to the same criteria regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned. Your team has clarified the most essential learnings for each unit of your course, agreed on the general pacing of the content, and developed a series of common assessments that will be administered to all the students in your course. You will benefit greatly from this clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and how they will be asked to demonstrate their learning for every unit you teach.

Your teammates will solicit your questions and recommendations regarding the curriculum and assessments and will encourage you to become an active participant in their decision-making process. Don’t hesitate to do so. One of the reasons the team recommended you for this position is its members felt you could make a contribution to their work.

Our commitment to equity also means the issue of what happens when some students do not learn is not left to chance or to the discretion of individual teachers. We have created a systematic intervention process to monitor student learning on a timely basis and to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning in consistent and directive way as soon as they experience difficulty. In order for that system to work, you must report student progress accurately and often and be as precise as possible regarding the skill or concept the student is struggling to master. Remember there is structure in place to support your efforts to help all students learn, and you must make certain your students have access to that structure.

You and your teammates will analyze the results from every common assessment, not only to identify students who are having difficulty, but also to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each member’s instruction. On every common assessment you will be given prompt feedback regarding the success of your students in achieving the team’s agreed-upon standard of proficiency compared to all the other students who took the assessment. The information is presented in a very user-friendly format and is openly shared among teammates, so everyone has a wonderful opportunity to learn about the materials and methods of colleagues who are getting the best results for each skill or concept that is taught. Your team will have a designated leader, but you will discover that leadership in this school is a function of expertise rather than position. When the evidence demonstrates you have been extraordinarily effective in helping your students learn a particular skill or concept, you will be encouraged and expected to take the lead in helping colleagues develop new insights and strategies in those areas.

Building shared knowledge is the prerequisite homework for making a decision in our school. We attempt to resolve every important question and issue by engaging in collective inquiry, jointly examining both external and internal evidence of best practice, and honestly assessing our own practice in light of the evidence. We operate from the premise, “Without evidence, you are just another person with an opinion.” We make our important decisions – what to teach, how to assess student learning, best instructional practices, how to assign grades, and so on – on the basis of evidence rather than opinions. Pilot projects are common and help us gather additional information before moving forward with a schoolwide initiative.

Every team is expected to develop and pursue SMART goals to drive the continuous improvement process of the school. The goal will be aligned with one of our school goals, will focus on results that require evidence of student learning, and will call for a significant contribution from every member of the team in order to be achieved.

One of the most powerful forms of professional development we experience is the ongoing, job-embedded learning that takes place among teammates as they work together to meet the needs of all their students. Days specifically set aside for professional development in the school calendar are typically reserved for teams. You and your teammates will be able to identify and pursue the topics you feel are most critical to achieving your SMART goals. We learn collectively, we stay focused on issues that have the most powerful impact on teaching and learning, and we move quickly to apply our new skills and insights. We value learning by doing, and you will see that working here is the best graduate program you could ever have.

It should be evident to you how serious we are about hiring people who fit our culture. Before you were offered a job here, the school principal and your team interviewed you at length, asked you to respond to a variety of different scenarios and probed your thinking. We have invested considerable effort to bring you to our campus, we expect you to be successful, and we are prepared to offer you extensive support to promote that success. To be recommended for tenure, however, you must prove your strong commitment to the learning of all students, become positive contributing member to your team, and demonstrate a willingness to continue your own professional learning.

This is a wonderful place to work. Celebration is an important part of who we are. Every faculty meeting celebrates the efforts and achievements of a variety of individuals and teams. The team process fosters both appreciation and recognition as you make contributions to your colleagues and they recognize the improvement in your teaching. The achievement of SMART goals is another cause for collective celebration and builds a powerful sense of individual and collective self-efficacy. You will have a sense of belonging and connection because you will always have someone to turn to for help in meeting the challenges of this profession. All the systems that have been created to keep us focused on student learning will remind you of the significance of the work we do, and there is something very powerful about being part of a collective effort to achieve a mighty purpose. Finally, you will become the very best educator you can be by virtue of the fact that you work in this school, and there is a tremendous sense of satisfaction that comes with fulfilling your full potential as a professional and as a person.

