

Emily Katz and Eric Juenke
1224 Mizzen Dr.
Okemos, MI 48864

To whom it may concern,

We write to give our strongest support for Emily Leinwand's application for a teaching position. Emily is an MSU teaching intern in our son's first-grade classroom. We have known her since August of 2019.

For context, it may be useful to have some background on our son. Charlie has ADHD and accompanying difficulties with defiance and emotional regulation. He struggles to accept authority figures, and he tests limits and rules frequently. He can easily get into a negative behavioral spiral with adults who seek to control his behavior by means of escalating negative consequences rather than by connecting with him and offering positive reinforcement. This has caused serious difficulties in a number of educational and childcare settings (including expulsion from two daycares and behavioral issues in day-camps). In kindergarten last year, he had an excellent teacher who helped him tremendously; as a result, his ability to regulate his emotions, as well as his behavior, improved significantly. Yet he continued to challenge his teacher's authority by often refusing to participate in class activities or to complete in-class work. Consequently, he began first grade somewhat behind on his math and literacy skills. This was beginning to fuel a cycle, especially with reading, in which he felt bad about his low skill level and so was resistant to working on them.

This is why the progress he has made with Emily and her co-teacher so far this year has been so impressive. His math knowledge has leapt ahead in just a few short months, and his reading and writing have improved dramatically. He now feels confident about his academic abilities, and his natural eagerness for learning has been sparked. We are absolutely amazed at the change, and we give full credit to Emily and her co-teacher.

Her approach to teaching is informed, creative, and open-minded. She and her co-teacher have implemented several learning interventions for Charlie that we believe are responsible for his academic progress. For example, to motivate Charlie to complete his work, they have implemented a system in which he can earn a short break after he finishes (five minutes set on a timer). As a result, instead of avoiding his work and wandering around the classroom, Charlie is now far more often on-task and focused. This and other such interventions have changed the academic incentive structure for Charlie in just the right way.

Charlie's behavior has also improved significantly, and we believe that this is due to his relationship with Emily and her co-teacher. Just a few weeks ago, he told us that they were "the kindest people in the whole school". It is obvious to anyone who observes Emily at work that she truly takes joy in teaching. She is upbeat and unerringly positive with her students. Emily's manner with Charlie is warm and playful, and she shows him in many ways that she cares for him and wants him to do well. For example, we often find notes from her to him in his backpack. These notes tell him things like how much she loved to see his excitement about sharing something with the class, or how impressed she was that he worked so hard on a particular task that day. Charlie loves these unconditionally encouraging notes and has been thriving in this warm and nurturing environment. What really impresses us, though, is that Emily has earned not just Charlie's affection but also his respect. Emily sees Charlie's strengths and gives him much positive reinforcement, while also holding him to a high

(but developmentally appropriate) standard and challenging him to improve in other areas. Because he feels that she cares about him and has confidence in him, Charlie trusts her and rises to the challenge.

Based on our interactions with her, it seems to us that Emily's success with Charlie is due both to her own expertise and skills and also to a set of personal qualities that have allowed her to adapt her approach to his needs. During parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings, Emily has been open to our ideas and experiences as parents. When we shared what we have learned about the kind of environment in which Charlie does well and some of the approaches we have seen past teachers use successfully, she enthusiastically got on board with our recommendations. For example, we have found that Charlie does best when he knows that his teachers are communicating regularly with us, and when his good choices are acknowledged and reinforced. We asked if Emily would complete a positive behavior chart for him to bring home each day, and she readily agreed and has followed through consistently. She and her co-teacher have also shared their techniques with the Specials teachers and done everything they can to help Charlie be successful even outside of their own classroom. We feel completely comfortable leaving him in their hands each school day.

As special as Emily's bond is with our son, we have every reason to expect that she does the same for all the children in her classroom. Emily is warm, caring, an excellent communicator, open to new ideas, and highly capable. She also clearly loves teaching. She balances well-earned confidence in her own skills as an educator with openness to parental expertise on the character and needs of individual children. These are the traits of a resourceful teacher who will seek out new sources of knowledge wherever they are available and continue to learn and adapt over the course of her career. It is hard to think of what better or more promising qualities one might look for in a teacher. We feel very fortunate that Charlie was assigned to her classroom this year, and know that her future students and their parents will feel the same way. She is a credit to the Okemos public school system, and we give her our strongest possible recommendation for this position.

If you have any questions or if we can provide any additional information, please feel free to contact us at (517) 643-4894.

Sincerely,



Emily Katz
Assistant Professor, Michigan State University
(and Charlie's mom)



Eric Juenke
Associate Professor, Michigan State University
(and Charlie's dad)