January 30, 2015

Dear Exchange Emerging Leader Committee,

Joel Metschke has been a leader at Hilltop since he first arrived 5 years ago as a college intern. He was replacing me as a teacher in the first year of our half-day program, and I will admit to a high level of concern about an intern taking on the responsibilities of a lead teacher. My fears were completely unfounded. From the very first day, Joel jumped into his role as a teacher with confidence, curiosity, and compassion. At our faculty meetings, he spoke up at the very first meeting he attended, asked thought-provoking questions, and participated as if he had been at Hilltop for ages. Since that meeting, Joel has proven himself time and time again as a thought leader and changemaker at Hilltop, and increasingly, in the field of early childhood education (ECE).

For the past four years, Joel has been a driving force in developing Hilltop’s half-day program from one with 50% enrollment rate to one with a lengthy wait list. In addition, he has helped turn around our once struggling after school program (60% to 90% full). These feats were accomplished through Joel’s confidence in building relationships with parents, his curiosity about how to develop powerful emergent curriculum, and his compassion for what drives and nurtures each child.

In addition to his work in the classroom, Joel has stepped into a variety of leadership roles, including a year as the Step Up Coordinator, developing systems for and supporting educators to participate in a faculty-wide leadership development project. A natural leader in the Hilltop community, Joel has independently sought opportunities to grow professionally, broaden his skills, and develop his thinking outside of our school. He has taken the initiative to seek out opportunities to give presentations to his peers and has facilitated various trainings inside and outside the ECE field.

This past September, Joel took a huge step in his leadership in the field of ECE by becoming the Business Manager for Hilltop’s professional development institute. In the past 6 months, Joel has leveraged that position to connect with educators, administrators, politicians, consultants, and other nonprofits, build internal systems and infrastructure to support faculty participation and professional growth, and brought over 150 ECE professionals to Hilltop to learn together.

In a short time, under Joel’s leadership, Hilltop has increased our capacity to serve the field, while supporting our educators in their leadership and professional development. His lens is always toward what will most benefit the stakeholders in the institute: faculty, families, fellow ECE professionals, and, most importantly, the children.

Joel is exactly the type of person Exchange is looking for to honor in their Emerging Leaders Edition. While he has already made an important impact on the children, families, and faculty at Hilltop, Joel will continue to emerge as a leader for children, families, and faculty throughout the field of early childhood education.

Please contact me if you have any questions or would like further information.

Sincerely,



Liddy Wendell

Executive Director

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