November 1, 2008 Personal Introduction Rich Edelen

Good day, I am Rich Edelen, the 8th grade Physical Science Instructor at The Buckley School, most of my students call me Mr. E. I would like to take a moment and explain why I am an educator and what brought me to teaching at Buckley.

As a student in high school, I was the typical underachieving student for most of my four years. Though I carried a high grade point average, I seldom participated more than the minimum required to pass the class; the teacher could not engage me. However, my senior year began and my schedule included two of the most unforgiving teachers in the school. The fact that I had to perform in two classes that I had no interest in and the teachers were difficult, at the least, was threatening to me. Never had I thought of becoming a scientist, or mathematician; instead, I wanted to be an accountant.

Senior year began, thus Mrs. Zaucha (Math) and Mr. Bell (Physics) began making their mark on my classmates and me. As the days progressed, most of the students became active participants in each of these classes. However, I was still a bit hesitant to open myself to the group, but my approach had changed by the end of the first month. These two teachers not only made fun something I did not like, but they gave me the desire to learn outside of the classroom. Numerous weekends throughout my senior year, several friends and I would meet at the local university inside the Science Library perusing the shelves for more information. We were in the library so frequently the staff thought we were already students of the university. Furthermore, Mr. Bell and Mrs. Zaucha showed me that what I was learning could be exciting if I could apply the topic to something I enjoyed. Often, classroom discussions started with a recap of the most recent football game, or basketball game, and transitioned naturally into the applications of Physics, Geometry, and Calculus in the outcome of the game. Mr. Bell and Mrs. Zaucha provided me tools, which enabled me to visualize concepts while also being an active participant in the classroom process.

Because of the effort of two great teachers, I graduated high school with a desire to study science and mathematics at the university level and that fall, I enrolled in The University of Akron as a Mechanical Polymer Engineering student. As I continued through my first few years of school, my approach toward my courses regressed. Once again, learning was something I had to do, not what I wanted to do. Frustration ensued, I was supposedly studying science and math because it was fun and I enjoyed the applications. However, I was no longer enjoying learning. In an effort to regain my passion for education, I decided to change my major to Geophysics. Granted, this does not seem to be a logical transition. This choice allowed me to continue studying what I enjoyed and apply it to something concrete like mountain building, tectonics, or water-transport mechanisms. In addition, I was now able to use what I had learned in the classroom to construct physical and numerical models of the Earth system, as well as collaborate with fellow students and faculty to produce research and experiments to further our understanding of these natural phenomena. Again, I was enjoying the process of learning.

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Upon earning my Bachelor of Science in Geophysics, I started working in the Geotechnical Engineering field as a Staff Geologist in a soils lab analyzing rock quality and soil moisture to determine whether a site was suitable for construction of buildings, highways, and other large structures. This work was exciting because it allowed required being on our drilling-rig collecting samples, conducting in-situ analyses, and working in concert with construction crews and site inspectors. Unfortunately, my company decided to progress away from soils and strictly inspect bridge surfaces and paint-coatings. Consequently, I was no longer getting to do the things that made my job interesting. I was now stuck under a bridge measuring the thickness of paint on support beams.

It was under a bridge spanning a revolting landfill when I remembered the teachers who had shown me the exciting aspects of science and this was not what I wanted. As a result, I started my quest to reciprocate the efforts of Mrs. Zaucha and Mr. Bell by becoming a science teacher. At this point, I embarked on an unconventional approach to becoming a teacher. I did not go back to school for a teaching certificate, instead I left a good-paying job hiding under bridges and returned to the mountains where appropriate application of my training could be used. One evening I stumbled upon a chance to work at a summer camp in a small mountain town in Southern California. Later, this job turned into an opportunity in Outdoor/Experiential Education that would last for an additional year and a half. My job was to take children climbing, biking, and hiking during the morning, and then teach Physics, Chemistry, and Astronomy in the afternoon and evening. It was here I realized the need to bring the lessons learned in the outdoors into a traditional classroom. For over two years, I worked with at least two thousand children for a minimum of three days and maximum of one week. In this capacity, I witnessed many ways through which children could learn. Most importantly, I realized a majority of these children found difficult concepts easier to understand if they were experiencing it themselves. They could relate this experience to their classmates by comparing and contrasting each of their individual results with one another and discussing the activity as a group. My reaction as I discussed my new path with my mother, “This is going to be fun. This is how I learn and I can help kids understand because this is what I understand.” My mother frequently reminds me of that moment.

My time at Buckley started in the fall of 2003 as the 8th grade Physical Science instructor. In addition to my role as Physical Science instructor, I taught Physics and Astronomy in the Upper School, 6th grade math, as well as mentoring the Upper School Robotics Team, Engineering Club, Backpacking Club, and Biking Club. Furthermore, I have integrated VEX Robotics into the 8th grade curriculum. Through this integration, I have seen shy children speak up and become team leaders, slower learners stand up and lead their design team, and most of the children enjoy the understanding of science and math through real world applications. It is my goal to instruct my students on the experience of science education. I hope to show them a new way of looking at their surroundings, as well as foster a love for learning. Possibly, one day, one of my students will decide to become a teacher and share their experience with a new generation of learners.