

## Mark Peterson

Mark Peterson earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation from the University of Wisconsin. Stout in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Later he earned his Master of Education in Quality Schools. He is currently works with Cognitive Disabled students and at risk students at our high school.

His personal educational philosophy is based on two key factors; relationships and respect. A teacher must get to know the student first and this includes understanding the student's learning style, strengths, weaknesses, backgrounds and interests outside of school. The second key factor he feels is important to a student's success is respect.

The students that are in his alternative program have not been successful in the traditional school setting. I let students know that this program is a fresh start for them to be successful and it is an opportunity for them to graduate from high school. This program is based on building positive relationships and getting students to believe in their abilities. I help them understand how achieving a high school diploma will positively impact their life."

Respect, Belong, and Work... Every school year Mark has a discussion with his students about respecting others so they understand that everyone is different and each student has different learning needs. He tells his students that he is more of a manager than the teacher because it reflects their future experiences as they will be working with a supervisor in a job setting. He explains to them that school is their job and their pay is knowledge.

Mark stated he has two unrealized goals that he would like to focus his attention on. The first goal is working with cognitive disabled students in his program to find and obtain employment when they are seniors. The second goal focuses on having 100% of his students enrolled in the General Education Diploma Options #2 program to graduate from the program. He takes his students on job shadows, facility tours and technical college tours throughout the year. He wants to work with community employers on developing a work program that can benefit students with disabilities. Once they have obtained a diploma they can think about furthering their education at a technical college, university or join the workforce.

When asked what the positive aspects he sees in education today Mark replied, "The change that one would like to see in education revolves

around standardized tests. I feel that the standardized tests hinder a teacher's professional creativity in creating a curriculum that meets the needs and interests of their students and cannot do in the classroom.

From a grandmother, of one of Marks' student, "If it hadn't been for Mark, I do not believe my grandson would have ever been able to achieve such milestones. I can never express how much he means to this family for everything he has done above and beyond being a special education teacher. Many people look at these kids as worthless or throw away children because they can't learn everything other children learn. Mr. Peterson looks at these children as someone who is special and should be treated with respect."

Brent Torrenga, Associate Principal of the Fort Atkinson High school notes " it is always an honor to work with Mr. Peterson as he generates a tremendous attitude toward education and our kids. He is able to constructively work through a variety of circumstances."

With pleasure, we nominate Mark Peterson for the Kohl Teacher Fellowship Award.