

January 9, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

It is an honor to write this letter in support of Central San's educational programming and Ben Lavender's recognition as a leader in community outreach and environmental education.

I have had the privilege of working in coordination with Ben for the last four years. As an elementary science teacher in the Lafayette School District, I was introduced to Ben over Zoom during the pandemic by a fellow science teacher. During that time, Ben artfully modified the hands-on waste water lessons he had previously been teaching in person, to help deliver fully remote hands-on lessons to all of the elementary students in grades TK-5th in my district (approximately 2,400 students). I was impressed with Ben's ability to guide students of varied ages and abilities through the inquiry process while they followed along at home. I knew immediately that I wanted to partner and plan for future lessons with him at Central San.

One of the many things that makes Ben such an exceptional educator and director is his insightful and collaborative approach to experiential learning. The lessons he has created for elementary students and teachers at Central San are not only carefully and thoughtfully tied to grade-level specific science standards, but they are open-ended to encourage students to explore and make meaning. Whenever he visits my classroom to introduce these lessons, I am always struck by how he models the spirit of inquiry for my students and also engages in the inquiry process himself around lesson design. Ben welcomes feedback from teachers, and encourages collaboration. I attended the 2023 summer teacher academy at Central San that he developed, and learned so much from my fellow teachers – our experiences and input felt valued, which is a testament to his leadership.

Whenever I connect with a new elementary science teacher in our area, I always recommend they visit the Central San website to check out the resources offered and contact Ben for more information. Ben and the programs he created at Central are truly a gem of high-quality science education experiences in the Bay Area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'MS' followed by a stylized flourish.

Molly Shannon
Elementary Science Teacher, Happy Valley School
Lafayette School District