

12/10/01

To Whom It May Concern:

I have had the pleasure of knowing Matt Palmer for a year and a half. He was a student in an AP language and composition class that I taught. He is now in a student in a school within a school in which I also teach. I recommend Matt to you. Matt is responsible for helping me revise a small prejudice that I have in the past entertained. Matt is a talented hockey player who has played on the school's varsity team for the past several years. My past experience with talented hockey players has not been entirely favorable. While they are often dedicated, they have never brought that dedication to bear on their academic studies. Over the past year and half Matt has impressed me with the dedication he brings to his studies. He has inquisitive mind and a mindset that makes him a true student. Furthermore Matt is an intelligent, principled and friendly young man. I would characterize Matt as in the top 5% of students that I have ever taught.

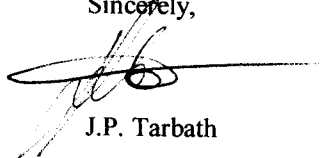
Matt is currently a student in The Seminar School (TSS). This in an alternative program within the larger school. The program uses the Socratic teaching style, termed Paideia by Mortimer Adler. In the program, most of the classes that are taught use great works of literature as a basis for the curriculum. Some of the authors that Matt has read include Plato, Buber, and Montaigne. I mention these authors to give you an idea of the quality of the ideas to which Matt has been exposed. Our program does not offer an honors track. Part of our philosophy is to work with students at all levels of ability. Having said that, the classes that Matt has taken are considered part of a honors/advanced group by the larger school. The fact that Matt joined a program such as TSS is significant. From a student's perspective there is some risk involved in straying from the mainstream. It is different and thus risky. Matt took that risk and in doing so demonstrated that he wanted to take some control over his learning. This independence is characteristic of a mature learner.

I initially came to know Matt last year in my AP class. Over the course of the year I saw him mature into a fine, thoughtful writer. What distinguished Matt in that class was the perceptiveness of his thoughts. He became willing to think divergently and to personalize his writing. Too often students approach essay writing formulaically. Perhaps that's the fault of the teaching. Matt was able to transcend that formula and began to write essays where his voice came through. Matt was an asset in that class. He consistently participated in the class and shared his insights. Matt stood out in that class as a true student. He consistently demonstrated a genuine interest in ideas. Students often only care about their studies only in terms of the grade. Matt did not seem to consider his studies in those terms. He never challenged me on a grade. He did, though, seek me out for further thoughts and improvements on his papers.

It seems to be a challenge during high school to be academically and athletically talented. Matt has successfully walked that tightrope. He is well respected by his peers. The refreshing element of this respect is that Matt has earned this respect without pandering to the group. Matt is his own man and will do what he wants. I see this reflected in classroom discussion where Matt is not afraid to disagree with the majority. Matt is able to use his own mind without falling prey to the opinions of others.

In conclusion I highly recommend Matt Palmer to you. He is ready to thrive at college. He has the mind and the will to be a true student.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.P. Tarbath', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

J.P. Tarbath