



Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Golden Apple Award | December 7, 2015

Clayton Smith

Special Education Paraprofessional

Clayton Smith has been a motivating leader and dedicated teammate in the Homer High School (HHS) intensive needs classroom for 15 years. He is considered the team captain in the room, based both on his positive attitude and enthusiasm for his work, as well as his vast knowledge and experience in the classroom. Clayton has taken time to get to know each student he works with very well. His experience with them allows him to identify their individual needs, to voice ideas and ways to meet those needs and support the students in very specific and personal ways. Clayton's many years working in the school with various classes and teachers has resulted in his being considered a jack of all trades. His student 'toolbox' is filled with strategies and methods that he uses based on the situation and need. Because of his vast knowledge of the students, school, and teachers, Clayton is incredibly flexible in his work. If a co-worker is absent, and a substitute is present, Clayton gladly adjusts his schedule to work with different students as needed. This flexibility is present in helping out team members as well. His knowledge base is critical in ensuring high quality supports for students in the school at all times. Clayton embraces the culture of inclusion at HHS, and finds creative ways to ensure students experience success and inclusion with peers daily. He wants all students to be a vibrant and vital part of the school community, and participate as fully as possible.

Clayton has been dedicated to KPBSD since 1992, when he first began as a custodian at McNeil Canyon School. He then worked as a paraeducator at Homer Middle School for two years before transferring to Homer High School as a paraeducator in 2002. In spite of his many years of work and commitment, Clayton continues to seek out new ways to learn and improve in his field. Clayton identifies areas of need in the team, and suggests topics that they would benefit from training in. He participates actively in trainings, and his newly learned approaches are seen incorporated into his daily work. He exemplifies the ideals of a lifelong learner.

Clayton engages in outreach within the school regularly. He gets to know students in the school outside of the intensive needs classroom, and makes great efforts to connect with all students in HHS. Clayton is known for his birthday greetings; he somehow knows the birthdays of every student in the school, and on their birthday, he seeks each one out and gives them a personal birthday greeting. This desire to connect with every student in the building, and willingness to take the time out of his very busy days to recognize and make a student feel connected and noticed exemplifies his approach to his work, going above and beyond his regular duties daily. He also helps in the development and implementation of school traditions. Annually for three years and counting, Clayton has served as the school host for a Thanksgiving lunch, providing a warm, home-cooked meal to students who have participated in or helped with activities in the intensive needs classroom, or worked individually with students in the room. This dinner is highly attended and valued; last year over 50 students came to eat together and be recognized for their efforts.

In addition to all his efforts connecting with students during the school day, Clayton has also been very involved with extracurricular events in the school. He has volunteered for the track team for 15 years, and was a girls' basketball JV coach for five years. Clayton uses his knowledge of athletic activities and his coaching skills to identify creative ways for general education students to aid intensive needs students, in order to include them more in the school setting. An example of this is his development of Paired Pairs in athletic activities. Clayton helped pair general education students to play next to an intensive needs student during an athletic activity; the general education student provides assistance both in showing the rules of the game, or what to do, as well as modeling the physical skills and actions necessary. Annually in the fall and spring, Clayton runs a tennis activity at the end of the day during the school Focus on Learning block, encouraging a general education student to play alongside students with intensive needs. This activity has been wildly successful; many students ask to participate in this venture. Last spring over 30 students participated in this weekly event.

Another example of this was when Clayton used his track knowledge to help discuss and initiate the development of a possible unified track team. Using his coaching knowledge and skill set, Clayton began advocating that a student he was working with may be successful in a school-based team such as track or cross country. Through Clayton's encouragement and knowledge, skills were taught to prepare this student slowly to possibly join the team. The student then began participating in running events over the summer. With the help of many adults, including the teacher, the cross country coach, and parents, school athletic director, the student joined the cross country team this fall, participating in practices, and even running in meets and regionals. At the awards banquet at the end of the season, he was recognized with an award for having the courage to start the race. Clayton's skill at noticing student strengths and building on them was the foundation for this student experiencing this success.

Clayton has used his experience as first mate on the Predator to help in the school setting. He helped shape the Homer Marine Trades Association Focus on Learning series at HHS, which introduces students to specific marine trades based in Homer. Clayton spoke with students about the opportunity, offered to contact individuals to present, attended presentations, and offered guidance in material to be presented. His passion for all students in the school setting shines in many more acts throughout his many years working at HHS.

Clayton exemplifies outstanding personal dedication and commitment to the school community that he serves. He is a devoted grandpa, dad, husband, teacher, teammate, and friend. He uses his knowledge and experiences to help shape all students as they learn and grow. He shares in the learning journey with his classroom team. His hard work ethic that is utilized as he serves as first mate on the Predator, also is exemplified daily at school with students. Clayton is grounded, salt-of-the earth, with a big heart that shows when he is overcome with emotion when students make small gains as well as epic milestones. Clayton shows students that he won't give up on them, and they in turn make efforts to grow and to prove him right.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Board of Education is proud to recognize Mr. Clayton Smith for his dedication to the students of the school district, past, present, and future.