



Meet Barbara Ferguson

Barbara Ferguson, also known as Barb or Mrs. Ferguson, has called Unity School home for the past twenty-seven years. She has taught Middle School English/Language Arts since she started in 1995 and continues to teach 6th grade to this day. In addition to teaching, Barbara took on the role of Middle School Director thirteen years ago. She is happily married and a proud mother of two sons. "I have been married for 22 years to my incredible husband, Greg. He is a Battalion Chief with Palm Beach County Fire Rescue and a wonderful role model to our two sons. Joey is 21 and Chris is almost 19. Both boys went to Unity School from toddler through graduation in 8th grade. They are

now both at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville. I love to spend my time with my boys when they come home to visit." She also likes to spend her free time enjoying relaxing activities: "My husband and I love to fish, spend time on our boat, listen to and play music, and travel. When I have quiet time to myself, I love to read all genres of books."

What is your teaching philosophy? My teaching philosophy is to create a safe environment that allows students to gain an understanding of themselves, make connections with the world around them, and have fun so they have a passion for learning. All the novels, writings, and peace education that we do relate to the real world in some way and/or tap into the creativity in each student. I believe in a lot of thought-provoking discussions, learning how to articulate thoughts and feelings, and developing empathy inside each student. I hope to spark the love of "something" in each student.

What is my greatest achievement as a teacher? My greatest achievement as a teacher is really just being able to touch the lives of young people who then go out and make the world a better place. I like to think that I had a small part in that. I love when our students return. We get graduates who are in high school who return to tell us that they didn't realize how lucky they were to be at Unity School. We get college graduates who are successful and come back to thank us for inspiring them. Now we have so many alumni who have brought their own children here because of their experiences as a Unity School student. That is the greatest achievement of all.

What is the most gratifying aspect of teaching? The most gratifying aspect of teaching is simply spending time with my students. Being the Middle School Director requires a lot of work managing teachers, parents, curriculum, schedules, and on and on. Teaching my 6th-grade students is the one part of my day that I cherish. I always say it feeds my soul and it really does. I also love to come up with new ideas and projects and then collaborate with my colleagues to give the richest experiences to our students.

Why did I choose Unity School? When I walked onto this campus in 1995, I knew in my heart that this was where I belonged; this was going to be my home. Really, Unity School chose me. I was so young when I started teaching here that I feel like Unity School helped raise me. With mentors like Maria Barber, Judith Carter, and now Genevieve Hoppe, how could I not be part of this great school?

What makes the Unity Middle School program unique? Unity Middle School is like no other school. Our teachers are passionate and caring, our parents are supportive and generous, and our students are smart, accepting, and kind. Our academics are exceptional but just as important, we are educating young people to be healthy, socially and emotionally. We teach our students to advocate for themselves and have a voice. We use a Kindness Curriculum which encourages Respect, Caring, Inclusiveness, Courage, Responsibility, and Integrity. We have CommUNITY groups so students have an advising group of students and teachers who learn to problem-solve together. We challenge our students to experience real life through activities, projects, field trips, and in-school experiences. Honestly, all of these things add up to a community where students are happy, empathetic, and have fun while learning.

What is your background and experience? I have been teaching English for 27 years. Before that, I taught a Kindergarten and 1st grade combined class for three years before moving to Florida. I have a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature from Stony Brook University and a Master's Degree from Hofstra University graduating Magna Cum Laude from both. I also spent nine incredible summers in college and after running teen tours. I was lucky enough to take 45 high schoolers each summer all over the country camping, hiking, and exploring. It sparked my love of travel. I am also a breast cancer survivor of two years and attribute my warrior spirit to the love and support of my family including my Unity family.