

Learning Resource Spotlight: Julie Dani



Around Stanley, parents may often catch Julie Dani moving through her day. Teachers and administrators certainly do, tapping into Julie's intel on a range of topics related to student success. She covers a lot of ground working in three classrooms across K-5 collaborating with classroom teachers to create clear plans for every student with more complex learning needs. Every day, she partners with classroom teachers and outside providers to implement those plans, collecting and analyzing reading and math data and synthesizing the data with teacher observations and ongoing informal assessments to render a clear picture of the whole child. "Among my favorite parts of my job," says Julie, "are the moments I get to observe our teachers. I am often left awestruck by the artful weaving of critical thinking and social-emotional awareness that becomes part of each lesson."

Julie's role is a central one in the K-5 classrooms, yet much of it takes place below student radar. Julie's efforts lend a supporting hand to teachers and can also touch parent communications. Says Julie, "My job is to make parents part of the educational plan, give them a clear understanding of how their student's plan is working and lend access to the resources they need to best support the needs of their student."

Another thing Julie is excited to be a part of at Stanley developed last year. In the Spring of 2015, Anne Schreiber and Julie worked together to co-create the Learning Resource Affinity Group. "This is a place for parents of students with complex learning needs to come together to build community," says Julie, "and to access the resources and education needed to support the growth of their student." Most recently, the group hosted a Q&A about executive function in our Pub Room with a prominent local child and adolescent psychologist.

"At Stanley," says Julie, "not only do we grow students who have a lifelong love for learning, but our teachers also embrace this philosophy personally." Julie has a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Kansas specializing in elementary education and special education. She took additional coursework in educational leadership, teacher training, childhood development, literacy development, social emotional development, yoga for children and collaborative problem solving. "I am also the parent of two amazing children," she says, "which has shaped me professionally as much as any of my coursework."

Having been in the field of education for more than 16 years in public, private and non-profit settings, Julie has worked as a classroom teacher, consulting teacher, researcher, teacher-trainer and program administrator. "When my oldest daughter was born, I knew that I wanted a part-time position that allowed me to balance the needs of my family with the needs of my students. It was also essential to me that my job matched my passions, skills and philosophy of education, both as a teacher and as a parent. I spent a lot of time observing at Stanley before accepting the position as a part-time learning specialist. Everyday that I was there, the joyfulness and love of learning was palpable, and five years later, I still see that daily."

It was not long after Julie joined Stanley in 2011 that she knew not only was Stanley a good fit for her professionally, but it was also a learning community where her whole family could grow together. "Our oldest daughter," she says, "is now having an amazing Kindergarten experience at Stanley."

The thing that represents Stanley most to Julie is the honoring of a child's authentic self. "At Stanley," she says, "we have the ability to see and embrace the whole child. We see deeply a child's intrinsic strengths and interests, we support each child in discovering new passions and we support their growth in areas of challenge. I am passionate about supporting teachers and helping parents grow in understanding of who a child is as a learner. I am passionate about building educational teams that include the teachers, parent(s), internal and external resources and the student. It is important to me that we see the whole child and that we are always in a place of awareness and inquiry about each student's strengths and areas of growth. It also feels vital that we have a clear plan for 'next steps' for every child and that we are in an ongoing process of evaluating if our plan is effective."

Julie grew up in the Midwest and southern United States. She did undergraduate work at the University of Texas at

Austin and began her teaching career there too. She then moved to KU to complete her graduate work. After grad school, Julie came to Denver to participate in a full-time volunteer community serving people who are living in poverty (like a local version of Peace Corp) and met her husband during her volunteer year. Julie went on to found a business that builds community for young adults with developmental disabilities and their families. While she's no longer involved with the day-to-day operations, that business has become a thriving, non-profit organization. Julie and her husband have two children, Ariana and Miriam who are the center of their world. "I love spending time with my family," says Julie... "as much of it as possible, outdoors in the midst of nature!"

A quote important to Julie embodies how she views her purpose here at Stanley. William Butler Yeats said, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." Says Julie, "As an educator, I long for our students to grow into compassionate human beings who have the capacity to think critically. I want to see children hold on to their innate ability question, wonder and be curious in their own learning. I want to support students in growing their capacity for deep self-awareness, reflection, creativity and passion for learning. I want our students to have the skills that they need to thrive in a community with a diverse population of human beings from all races, religious and political beliefs, socio-economic levels and life experiences. Most of all, I want all students to unfold into their true selves and have the confidence to bring their authentic gifts fully into the world."