

Why I Teach:

Sue Arabia



After 35 years, not everyone can truly say they look forward to coming to work each morning, but Sue Arabia wholeheartedly agrees with this sentiment.

Sue first came to Benchmark as a 19-year-old college student completing a field experience. “I was fortunate to be in the classroom of a gifted, dynamic teacher who inspired the students (and me) to take risks and love learning, which has had an impact on me to this day,” Sue said. “So after being offered the opportunity to become a Benchmark teacher after graduating from college, I felt so blessed.”

Today, Sue serves as a Head Teacher in the lower school and teaches language arts and social studies to third and fourth grade students. In her years at Benchmark, she’s also had the opportunity to teach second through sixth grade, teach in the Benchmark Summer Camp and After-School Guided Study program, and be a staff liaison for after-school clubs.

“I remember always wanting to be a teacher, perhaps because I saw the dedication of my own teachers,” she said. “When I was in 8th grade, I helped out with a Sunday School class for children with special needs, and I think that experience was confirmation for me that teaching was my calling.”

Sue not only has followed her life’s calling by becoming a teacher, but feels as though being able to teach at Benchmark has been the cherry on the cake. “Benchmark is a place filled with passionate and compassionate people and when I wake up in the morning, I am excited to begin my day,” she said. “I love that we are challenged as teachers and that the Benchmark culture is about the idea that both students and staff alike should continually grow and learn.”

What are some other things Sue loves about the Benchmark community? Sue mentions the collaboration of staff “working together for the good of each child,” the “strong, positive energy and commitment to learning and excellence,” and the “dedication of Benchmark parents to their children and how well they partner with us.” But most of all, Sue truly enjoys the students she has the opportunity to work with. “Benchmark students are persistent and resilient, as well as optimistic and ready to learn in the face of challenges,” Sue said. “I love that Benchmark students open themselves up to the learning process and are willing to look closely at themselves as learners. Getting to see children grow in confidence, knowledge, and awareness of themselves is just beautiful.”

Tell us about yourself, Sue!

Where did you go to school? Bishop Shanahan High School, Cabrini College, where I majored in elementary and special education, and the University of Pennsylvania, where I earned a masters degree in education.

What is your favorite memory from your school years? Teaching Sunday School, coaching softball, being in extracurricular activities (like band, chorus, community service corps, and the school play), and walking home from school with friends and stopping at the library along the way.

What teacher most influenced you? I had many teachers who challenged and inspired me. My 8th grade teacher gave me the chance to teach a Sunday School class for children with special needs, which was a life-changing experience. I had professors in college who were passionate about teaching and education. The teacher who probably had the greatest impact on me, though, was Irene Gaskins. Her optimism, vision, and dedication to children and learning, and her belief in the importance and worth of everyone she met

helped me grow considerably as an educator and person.

What is your favorite book? I have loved and lived in so many books, from Nancy Drew and Louisa May Alcott to Tolkien and Ursula LeGuin, and later Harry Potter with my son. I “met” Jane Austen in college and Faulkner at a Benchmark book club. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith is a beautiful book about resilience and one of my favorite books.

Favorite inspirational quote? “Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.” —Rumi

What are your hobbies outside of Benchmark? I like to read and take walks around the neighborhood with my dog, out in the woods, or on the beach. I also enjoy spending time with my cousins telling family stories.

Tell us about your family. My husband is Patrick, and we have a 22-year-old son, Thomas, and a dog named Abby.