

**Black Horse Pike Regional School District
Alumni Spotlight - TRITON
JANUARY 2021**



KAITLIN DANNIBALE, CO '2010

“Kaitlin is an elementary school teacher at Bellmawr Park School. She's become the kind of teacher that all students remember forever and has already made a huge difference in their lives. She was recently nominated for the Governor's Educator of the Year award by a parent of a student for her ability to go above and beyond in teaching during a pandemic.”

~Rachelle Omenson, Fine Arts Teacher, Triton HS

1. AA: Upon graduation, what post-secondary path did you take and why?

***KAITLIN:** I attended Rowan University. I graduated in 2014 with a degree in Elementary Education and American Studies. I have wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember. I was that little girl, playing “school” in her basement, grading fake papers, begging her mom for a white board to use for “instruction”, and forcing my sister and her friends into being my “students.” There was never anything else for me...it was always teaching. The main thing that called me to teaching was the chance to make an impact on the world. I wanted to be a positive role model for my students, like my past teachers had done for me. I wanted to be “that” teacher for someone. I wanted to change my students’ lives for the better.*

2. Looking back, would you have done anything differently and why?

***KAITLIN:** I don’t think I would have done anything differently. I try not to focus too much on “shoulda, woulda, coulda.” Each moment of my life has led me to where I am today and I am grateful to have a career I love so much.*

3. AA: Describe your career/profession today?

***KAITLIN:** I am a 1st Grade teacher in Bellmawr, NJ. This is my seventh-year teaching. I am so lucky to spend every day with my tiny best friends! My biggest goal as a teacher is to create a safe, inclusive, and accepting classroom where my students love to be. I am so proud to head our district’s Diversity Committee to promote awareness and an understanding of the importance and value of diversity in our schools and community.*

4. AA: What impact did your BHP high school have on your career path/profession?

***KAITLIN:** The biggest impact Triton had on my career path was solidifying what I already knew to be true. When I was 4 years old, I attended the Preschool Program offered by Triton. It was a class that was led by high school students who wanted to teach after college. It was always my dream to be in the same class when I finally got to high school. My junior year, I finally took Childhood Development with Mrs. Geyer. It was the last year they were offering the program and I am lucky to have gotten a spot. Being in the classroom with students, planning lessons, and reflecting on how incredibly happy it made me was just another reassurance that I was heading in the right direction. Being a student in the class when I was 4 and then being a “student teacher” during its last year was a full-circle experience.*

5. AA: Was/were there specific teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, secretaries or other professionals that had a major impact on you while in school, and if so, who were those professionals? Describe how they helped you along your HS journey.

***KAITLIN:** There are so many teachers and staff members at Triton who impacted my high school experience. There is not enough room to list them all! There is **Mrs. Vives** (who I still refer to as Miss McMahan), who was right out of college my freshman year and just “got” us. There is **Mrs. Gucciardi**, who taught me what strength and courage and fearlessness looks like. There is **Ms. Omenson**, who gave me a safe space to make mistakes and taught me a valuable lesson about not having to be perfect. There are others who awakened a love for subjects I didn’t know I would love...**Mrs. Armstrong, Mr. Terruso**...the list goes on and on.*

*But the most important teacher to me is **Ms. Chambers**. I don’t know what she saw in me when I entered her Honors US History class, but I’m glad she saw something. Over the course of two years learning from her, she helped instill a confidence in me that I had never had before. She always encouraged me, even when I was sure I couldn’t do it...like with all of our DBQs! Ms. Chambers taught me so much. She taught me how to be a better reader, a better writer, and a better student. But, most importantly, she taught me how to be a better person.*

6. AA: Which school clubs, sports, activities, etc., if any, did you participate in at THS? Were there any moments or experiences that you can recall that helped you become the person you are today?

***KAITLIN:** My senior year I was the President of Future Teachers of America. This is one of my proudest moments at Triton. I was an active member the first three years of high school and had hopes of leading the club my last year. I loved helping run Future Teachers. One of my favorite events was the Santa Breakfast we held for members in the community. After the event ended, we realized all of the photos had been out of order and we had no way of knowing whose photo was whose. We had to call each family to figure it out. That moment really embodies what it’s like to be a teacher. You can plan everything in detail and think it is all going to go smoothly...and then life happens!*

7. AA: Please share any other favorite memories of the Black Horse Pike Regional School District, your HS in particular, that would inspire today's youth?

***KAITLIN:** I am grateful for my experience with my Honors and AP classes. We looped each year as a group and spent most of our high school experience together. After all, when you are meeting after school at 5pm to eat pizza and review classroom walls filled with 300 years of American history to prepare for the AP test, you create a special bond! I always say that I was lucky to have such a great group of friends to experience high school with.*

*I also have to shout out "Edstravaganza." It was a special day put together by some awesome Class of 2010 alumni. The last week of school, all of the seniors met at 6:30 AM in the senior parking lot. Everyone brought something to contribute to the event. Grills, slip n' slides, food, activities...you name it, we had it. It was the year **Mr. Stahl** retired, along with our graduation, so we combined both and had one last hurrah. Someone even made Mr. Stahl a cake and he came out to spend time with us. The best part was that administration loved the idea so much, they let us skip the first few periods and stay out there, together. It was an incredible way to end an awesome high school experience.*

8. What advice would you give to our current student body? What would you have done differently in high school if you could turn back time?

***KAITLIN:** My advice is to stay true to who you are. You can never be reminded of this too often...**YOU ARE ENOUGH.** There is so much pressure in high school, and in life, to change to please other people, but the most important thing is being happy with yourself. Remember that your body is just a vessel for your soul. What you are going to give to this world is so much more than your outward appearance. The right people are going to love you for the right reasons. Wait for those people.*

